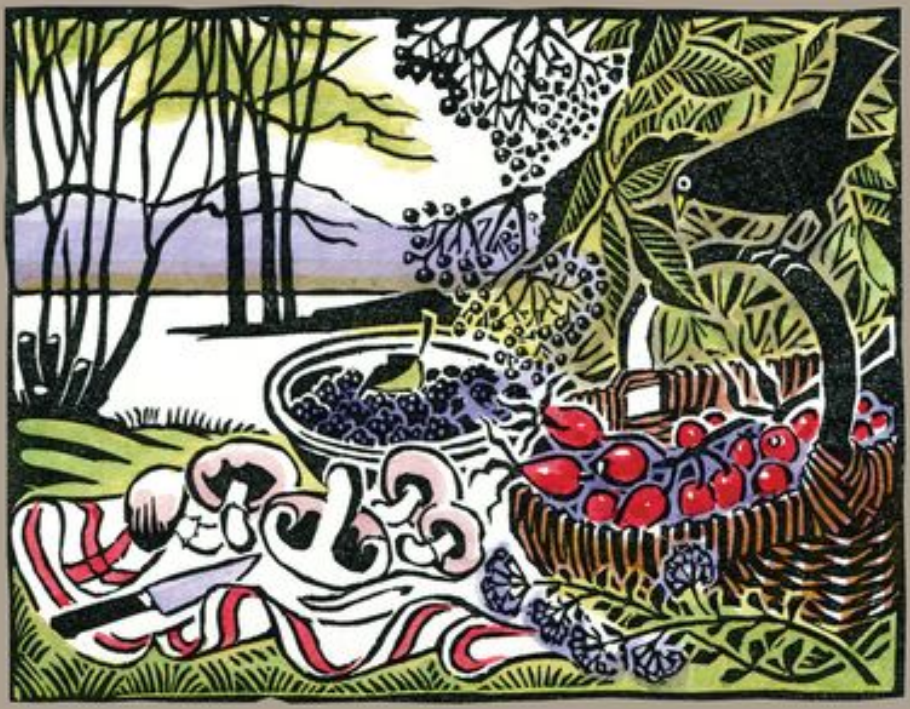
A HANDBOOK OF SCOTLAND'S WILD HARVESTS



The essential guide to edible species with recipes & plants for natural remedies, and materials to gather for fuel, gardening & craft

edited by Fi Martynoga

"I have collected mushrooms myself for many years, and all our chefs are experienced in gathering wild local ingredients for our dishes. What I find really exciting about this book is the number of unusual flavours and species it highlights, and how many new ones we can look for in addition to the more familiar species. In Scotland the value of our wild ingredients has been well recognised and valued long before foraging became as fashionable as it is now. This guide reveals so many new possibilities and emphasises how lucky we are to have such a fantastic variety of edible wild mushrooms, plants and seaweeds. All this bounty makes us the envy of top chefs not just in the UK but around the world. With the resurgence of interest in sustainability and the creative use of our native fresh ingredients, this inspiring and comprehensive resource comes at the perfect time."

Andrew Fairlie *Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles is Scotland's only 2-Michelin starred restaurant*

"This is a treasure-chest of practical information, first-hand experience and common sense advice, laced with passion and enthusiasm, that will inspire and give confidence to go foraging safely and sustainably."

Tess Darwin, *Falkland Centre for Stewardship*

"We have been foraging our lands for centuries to feed, clothe and warm ourselves. Here Fi Martynoga has put together an incredibly informative handbook detailing all things edible, drinkable and sustainable. Now, where are my wellies?"

Neil Forbes, *Scottish Restaurant Awards' Scottish Chef of the Year 2011*

"This book is like a box of treasure: dip in and you'll find fascinating nuggets of information that will make you appreciate Scotland's wild harvest so much more."

Danielle Ellis, *blogger for the Edinburgh Foody (edinburghfoody.com)*

A HANDBOOK OF SCOTLAND'S WILD HARVESTS

SCOTTISH WILD
HARVESTS ASSOCIATION
& REFORESTING SCOTLAND

edited by Fi Martynoga

Saraband

***CAUTION**: consuming wild plants can induce severe (even, in rare cases, fatal) reactions. Always try new species carefully in very small quantities and avoid plant families that provoke allergic responses (see plant families in the Seasonal **H**arvesting charts); check before serving wild plants to your guests. This handbook should **not** be used alone for plant identification. See pages 14 to 15 for further safety information, page 113 for the safe mushroom picking code, page 170 before using plants as remedies, and page 248 for recommended identification guides. Neither the publisher nor the experts or charities who have compiled this book can accept any liability for any adverse effects caused by handling or consuming wild plants.*

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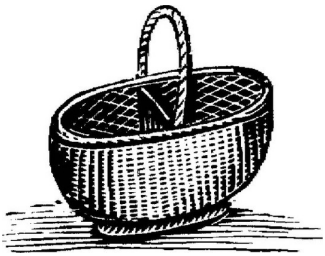


PREFACE

Mankind evolved in the wild. Foraging and hunting are in our genes, though shooting and fishing are beyond the scope of this book. So many of us in Scotland now live in cities, far removed from nature, that a return to picking anything other than brambles can present problems. There's one set of anxieties about identifying species correctly and another set about trashing natural resources.

This book should reassure and set you up with the information you need. It is designed to tell you what you might find, and where and when you might come across it in Scotland. Foraging in the Scottish countryside is nothing new. In 1709 an early Keeper of the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens, Dr Robert Sibbald, wrote a detailed account of species used by country people in times of scarcity. Many of them correspond to what you will find in this book, which covers the most useful and widespread species in detail but also mentions lesser known ones. Most of them are natives but others are naturalised, or may be found within semi-wild areas such as estates and parkland. Almost all of them are

resilient, so harvesting them sensitively will not threaten them.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of members of the Scottish Wild Harvests Association and Reforesting Scotland, the book has progressed from a passing thought to a practical reality in just a few months. Shaping it and drawing the many contributions together has engrossed me all winter, giving me longings for spring and the start of new harvests.

People have written at different lengths according to their expertise, the time they could offer, or in response to my badgering. Submissions varied from a couple of recipes, to whole chapters of carefully researched and laid out information. Several chapters are composites, made up of many of these offerings, all of which have been attributed to their authors, although occasional paragraphs have been moved from their parent text to a more appropriate chapter. In those cases, attribution has not always been possible for aesthetic reasons, or those of space. Where whole entries are unattributed, it is because I have written up an 'orphan' species by drawing on my own foraging enthusiasms and repertoire of recipes.

Although not primarily intended as an identification guide, you should find the species descriptions helpful in differentiating many plants. To assist you further with photographs, we will be releasing a mobile phone app version of this book (please see www.saraband.net for more details).

However, there is still an abiding need for good identification books, and the bibliography will supply you with a list of some useful ones. Once you are completely sure of a plant's identity, this book will fill out its portrait in a way that a field

guide cannot hope to. Whatever you go out seeking, slip it into your basket, as foraging trip are full of surprises. Good hunting!

Fi Martynoga

INTRODUCTION

There have been a number of foraging books published over the past few years, but none quite like this one. One clue rests in the title – this book is from Scotland. What grows, and when, differs
between north and south, even in a country as small as the UK. Even more importantly, this is a collaboration between two of Scotland's passionate environmental organisations, networks of people who want to change the world, and get their hands satisfyingly dirty in the process. Reforesting Scotland (RS) has a mission to 'restore the land and the people' and it all started with hands-on tree planting. A social and political vision has alway guided its activities, but the personal and the practical is always there as well, due to the kinds of people Reforesting Scotland attracts as members. An example of this is the organisation's pioneering work on the potential and benefits of non-timber forest products in Scotland, which led to the birth of the Scottish Wild Harvests Association (SWHA).

Promoting sustainable harvesting is part of SWHA's *raison d'être*. Using wild products is more than a fashion for us; it's a treasured part of life, now and, we hope, in the future. This book either sticks to species that are abundant enough to be harvested without causing harm, or, in cases where there may be some danger of overexploitation, details how to avoid it.

The writing itself was gathered by putting out a call among RS and SWHA member experts and asking for 'species champions': someone for each species who would give not

just dry facts, but also the reasons why they routinely take that particular plant or fungus into their lives and homes. From across Scotland people who live and work with trees and wild resources responded, people who look to the woods and the wild not just for food, but also for medicines, craft products, heating, shelter and materials, and inspiration for gardening and managing land. They've written from personal knowledge about what foraged goods inspire them most. The result is a diverse collection of writings drawing on a tremendous depth of collective experience. Lifelong experts and trained professionals have shared their knowledge generously, giving invaluable tips on preparation and harvesting, and fascinating glimpses of ecological and cultural contexts. Even the most experienced forager will find something here that is intriguing, useful and new.

The first chapter just had to be one on sustainable and responsible harvesting. Wholistic as ever, we see the long-term
survival of the forager as part of this, so look here for some hints on foraging safely as well.

The key species chapter picks just four of all Scotland's useful native species to look at in depth: nettle, elder, hazel and heather. They are all common and resilient, and have proved to be outstandingly useful, both now and throughout Scotland's past.

The next few chapters focus on food and drink. Each species is chosen for its availability, its usefulness, and because someone valued it enough to champion it. Salads, greens, fruits, nuts, seaweed, mushrooms and fabulous flavourings are all introduced, along with many insights into how best to use and harvest them.

There is, however, far more to foraging than food. This is ably demonstrated by a qualified medical herbalist, who uses foraged herbs in her own practice. She has drawn on this knowledge to provide a useful guide matching common plants and familiar ailments, and how you can gather and prepare beneficial wild herbs for yourself.

Kindling and fallen wood are another benefit from the forests, but unless your home is tiny or wonderfully well insulated, casual foraging will never provide enough fuel to heat it, so the next chapter gives detailed and very practical notes on how to manage firewood at a household level.

The final chapter introduces a few of the many other things we can forage for, to provide beautiful and useful things, and to enhance our gardens and restore the land. It focuses on just a few of the most popular crafts and of the most useful species. It ends by outlining ways we can start to give a little back to the wild, by providing habitat, propagating species and creating our own intensive foraging niches.

The split between domestic and wild is a cause, in many ways, for regret. We can easily lose sight of the world beyond our own inventions, fail to notice the passing of the seasons, forget the web of life that supports and enables everything that we are and do. In so doing we miss out on a thousand simple pleasures. Foraging helps to bridge the gap a little, giving reasons to get outside, and reasons to pay attention to what is growing there. Once you've learned the basics, wild food greets you whenever you venture to anywhere green, and materials for creating useful
and beautiful things beckon from the woods, fields and hedgerows. Whether you want to learn those basics, or to add a little more to your own lifetime store of foraging

experience, this handbook should prove a useful and interesting guide.

Emma Chapman

Scotland's first champion of foraging

If anyone deserves the title of Scottish foraging's greatest champion, it has to be Sir Robert Sibbald (1641–1722). A leading light of the early Scottish Enlightenment, Sibbald was a physician and held the post of Geographer Royal. This was at a time when geography meant almost anything under the sun, from archaeology to geology to biology.

Co-founder/supporter of Edinburgh's physic garden (now the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh), and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Sibbald was also responsible for coordinating a great survey of Scotland. He commissioned Martin Martin's tour of Gaeldom, a great source of wonderful historical
plant uses from the north and west of the country. The information Martin brought back, combined with a host of other research, was distilled by Sibbald into the first forager's

manual, *Provision for the Poor in time of dearth and scarcity*. This wonderful 24-page account of potential famine foods was intended to prevent the kind of disastrous famine of 1674 that had afflicted Aberdeenshire and Tayside. A series of lists cover everything that could possibly be eaten in early eighteenth-century Scotland – from cultivated plants to seabirds. It is a fascinating read even for the traditional names of some of the fish alone: 'Blokan' and 'Muckraig' don't sound particularly tasty! Sibbald mentions eight different cetaceans, but no fungi, showing that suspicion about mushrooms has a long history.

The pamphlet includes more than eighty wild plants that Sibbald suggests would be invaluable food for the poor, were famine to return. Most (but not all) of the plants and animals are readily identifiable today, and Brian Moffat gives a good interpretation of many of the plants in *SHARP Practice* vol. 6 (Moffat, 1998). As well as the lists, Sibbald also includes some interesting articles on who used these foods and how, with an account of one of Scotland's speciality wild foods – Karemyle (bitter vetch – *Lathyrus linifolius*), as well as this recipe for a 'restorative cordial':

> *Take of Earthnuts [pignuts]; the knops of the Karemile [bitter vetch tubers], Roots of Angelica, Roots of Silverweed, Juniper Berries, Bourtree [elder] Berries, of each an handful, make a Powder of them & with a sufficient quantity of Honey and a dozen yolks of Egges, a Paste may be made; a little of this taken alone, or with Water, will relieve fainting.*

The importance of this little pamphlet cannot be overstated: it's an amazing piece of social history for anyone with a

passion for wild foods. Thankfully, it is available now as a facsimile.

Greg Kenicer

CHAPTER ONE

SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE HARVESTING

How to collect wild food is a privileged knowledge: how to collect without harm to yourself, to other people, to the plant you are collecting and to the place where the plant lives will stand you in good stead to continue gathering into the future.

Gathering safely

Your safety (and that of those you invite around for dinner) is dependent on your ability to positively identify a species. Getting to know a species so that you can spot it out of the corner of your eye at a distance and learning a new plant are totally different skills. An old friend just looks right, but with a new one you need to check every characteristic. Going out with a skilled gatherer is great because they will be able to point out the salient features. Many identification guidebooks try to fulfil this role, but it just isn't the same. Learning to use keys, particularly learning the terminology, will save you from poring over pictures of plants or fungi that have all started to look a bit, but not exactly like your specimen. Once you can use a key you have the power to identify!

The most obvious risk to you of gathering is misidentification and this book really tries to help you avoid this by selecting unmistakable species and making you aware of possible

lookalikes. Until you know a species inside out and back to front, keep checking your identification. This is particularly true of fungi as several edible species have lookalikes which may be toxic, or even fatal. Follow the picking code we suggest in the Wild Mushrooms chapter (p113) and bear in mind that there can be quite significant variation between specimens, so err on the side of safety.

Variation is something we also need to look out for in people. Something that might be edible and tasty to one person might make another sick, so when you try something for the first time, just have a little bit. Where it is particularly common for a species to not agree with some people, we have pointed this out.

Where you collect is also important. Avoid areas where there has been recent crop spraying, former industrial sites (fungi in particular take up heavy metals), road sides and, unless you are picking from high up, dog walking routes – sometimes it can be difficult for urban gathers to find uncontaminated sites. Finally, try to pick specimens that are fresh. Older plants will be less tasty and may be woody; older berries and mushrooms may be home to some larvae or a whole new crop of different fungi.

It's useful to know where you stand with regard to the law on gathering, but if you are behaving responsibly and courteously, you are unlikely to need that knowledge. Under Scottish common law gathering without the permission of the landowner (whether for personal use or for commercial purposes) could be considered theft, but customary practice is such that gathering for personal use is regarded as being part of the right of access given under the Land Reform Act. This was reflected in a change to the Forestry Commission

Scotland's policy on gathering on their own land and their recommendation to other woodland owners, which now allows for gathering for personal use without permission. Gathering for commercial purposes without permission is specifically excluded from the right of access. No one is allowed to pick plants from nature reserves or sites of special scientific interest, the property of the National Trust or the Ministry of Defence.

Of course it's up to you whether you ask for permission, but a few things to consider are: whether the landowner is using this resource themselves; whether you would be polite to ask permission, or whether you would be making a nuisance of yourself; and whether, by developing a relationship with a landowner, you might be able to influence the way they manage the land.

None of the species mentioned in this book is protected by law, but if you feel inclined to try something new it might be worth checking its status beforehand.

Sustainable gathering

Many of the species mentioned in this book are common and hard to kill (ground elder, dandelions, nettles…) so you can feel particularly virtuous that you are eating a weed. Some are more sensitive due to rarity, habitat or the part of the plant that you are gathering and you need to think a bit more carefully about the proportion that you take, the frequency that you return to a site and the method that you are using.

The least vulnerable part of a plant to harvest is the foliage as it will usually grow back. Some plants are much more tolerant than others of regular cutting so it is a good idea to limit the proportion of foliage that you take to less than a third and not

to return until what you have taken has grown back.

Fruits are similarly uncontroversial, but do remember that they are a food source for others and will bring a new generation to harvest. Mushrooms, being the fruiting bodies of a fungus, also fall into this category. Research has shown that damage to the body of the fungus by trampling the area has an impact on future fruiting, whereas picking mushrooms by pulling or cutting, whether every fruiting body is harvested or only a proportion, does not.* Flowers are obviously more important to annuals than to trees, shrubs or perennials as they promote growth in the following year. A good rule of thumb would be to not take more than a fifth of the flowers from an annual.

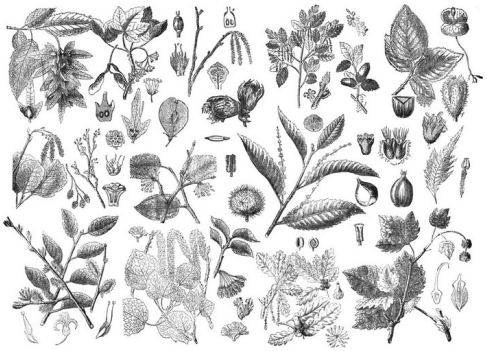
Taking woody growth is obviously a higher risk to a plant, except in the cases where new growth will quickly sprout up (willow and hazel, for instance, both of which particularly lend themselves to management through coppicing). Finally, harvesting the whole plant or the root is likely to kill it, so only collect where that species is plentiful and only collect a small proportion of what is there.

Alison Dyke

***Source**

Egli, S and Ayer, F, 1997. '*Est-il possible d'améliorer la production de champignons comestibles en forêt? L'exemple de la réserve mycologique de La Chenéaz en Suisse.' Revue Forestière Française* 49: pp235–243.

CHAPTER TWO



KEY SPECIES

Some wild plants stand out as enormously useful. In Scotland the nettle has been acknowledged for hundreds of years as a food, tonic, medicine and source of fibre. Elder has a similarly long history of use; in fact archaeologists think that it was one of the first plants used in brewing alcohol. It has long been considered the most important ingredient in the medicine chest of the wild – and still is by some. The case for hazel and heather is probably more to do with traditional use than with current reality. Hazelnuts are the most easily available source of wild vegetable protein and kept prehistoric people in Scotland alive during the winter when other vegetable foods were scarce. The tree also had, and still has, many practical uses. The second, heather, which signifies Scotland for many, has also had a very significant place in our domestic past and continues to be beloved of beekeepers. You could add birch as a further key species, since it is useful and ubiquitous. However, the main entry for birch can be found in the chapter on crafts, Bringing the Wild Back Home, though you will come across references to it throughout the book. The four we have chosen as key species – nettle, elder, hazel and heather – similarly crop up in several chapters: they are too versatile to pin down to one. They are presented here not in alphabetical order as in other chapters, but in an order that relates to their usefulness.

NETTLE

Urtica dioica

This unmistakable tall perennial with its sting-bearing bristly stems and deeply serrated leaves is dioecious: that means the male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. Neither male nor female flowers are colourful – a greyish green – but the male flowers are more tassel-like.

Habitat

Nettles follow humans. They require a soil high in phosphate, and have a predilection for disturbed ground – both characteristics of soils around human habitations. They also benefit from the high nitrogen levels associated with human middens! Given the right soil, you will find nettles everywhere from roadside verges to woodlands. The richer the soil, the larger (and more nutritious) the nettles are likely to be – a point to bear in mind when foraging.

Uses

Almost everyone in Scotland knows nettles are edible and how rich they are in iron and vitamins, with trace elements dredged up by their deep, inquiring roots from the mineral portion of the soil. They are widespread, difficult to misidentify, and always plentiful. They have so many uses, and most have been explored at some time in every part of the country.

Their tall stems contain a strong and pliable fibre, which has been exploited from the Bronze Age to the present day. We know this because the mummified victims of prehistoric sacrificial bog burials were found to be wearing nettle fibre clothes. More recently there is documentary evidence that German soldiers in the First World War were kitted out in nettle uniforms. In our own time Birte Ford in Perthshire has developed her own method of extracting the fibre from winter stems, carding, spinning and plying them to create a range of unique artistic and practical products, using crochet, weaving, knitting and sewing.

Nettles are used in dyeing; not just yellow and grey-green dyes for fabrics, but also in the production of a green food colouring (E140, to be precise), for which they have been grown commercially.

Many medicinal uses are attributed to the nettle – from a tradition of thrashing rheumatism sufferers with nettles in order to alleviate the pain by creating inflammation, to its known tonic, diuretic and astringent properties. Nettles are used as homeopathic remedies to treat chickenpox, gout and bruising, among other things, and have been used externally to clear up skin complaints including eczema. See p178 for a

more detailed account of nettles' healing potential.

Curious customs and superstitions follow the nettle. In the days when it was believed possible to have the farm's milk output curdled by witchcraft, nettles were employed in counter-spells to undo the damage. Most puzzling was a belief in Shetland that nettles placed in the bed of someone you fancied on Hallowe'en would somehow win their heart!

But what is often overlooked about this essential survival plant is its enormous value to wildlife. It is the main food source for the caterpillars of some of Scotland's most well-known and loved butterflies (including small tortoiseshell, peacock, red admiral and comma), some spectacular moths (including one actually called The Spectacle), and it supports around forty other species of insect. This is not surprising – hiding among the stinging hairs help keep them safe from predators. At the end of summer nettles carry a prodigious quantity of seed, and are visited by goldfinches and other seed-eating birds. So when gardeners allow a patch of
nettles to thrive in the garden, they are not only attracting wildlife, but establishing themselves a great source of natural plant fertiliser, a home-grown medicine chest and a veritable living larder, as Scottish foragers are well aware.

However, nettles are perhaps best known as a vegetable, used in any recipe calling for spinach and cooked in the same way. The young leaves make excellent fillings for pies, pasta and pizza, and made into purée are a brilliant tasting side vegetable. Tales of nettle leaves being eaten raw in salads are largely hearsay – but it has been known!

Nettle tea is a real tonic. Just make sure you use the

well-washed leaves and not the flowers, which are likely to harbour a great deal of wildlife that doesn't look great suspended in your lovely hot drink. Nettle beer is refreshing and mildly alcoholic, and easier to make than conventional ale. Wine can also be produced from the plant.

Harvesting

Perhaps it goes without saying that nettles should be gathered with care! It is best to use washing-up gloves and wear a long-sleeved shirt. Once gathered, keep the gloves on to wash and prepare the nettles, although as soon as they feel the heat of cooking, the stings disappear. Avoid picking near roads as there is too much salt spray and mud splatter. Go for non-flowering shoots, the younger the better. Discard older stems that are trying to become string. You can manage a verge or nettle patch by cutting them back hard two or three times in the year – then you will have a supply of young, tender shoots almost all year round. Leave plenty for the insects and birds.

Margaret Lear

Recipes

For nettle tea, see p138 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.

NETTLE SOUP PLUS

A colander of nettle tops

A cup of ground elder or bishop's weed

1 large potato (diced)

1 small onion (diced)

1 litre/2 pints stock (Marmite-flavoured is good)

Salt and pepper

Fry onion and chopped potato gently in butter, then add washed greens and stir-fry for a few minutes. Pour in stock, cook for about twenty minutes, and then liquidise. This should serve four people easily. *(Note: traditional recipes for soups like this often include a handful of young comfrey leaves, which taste good, but they are now not recommended for anything other than external use as they contain a carcinogen and can harm the liver.)*

NETTLE HAGGIS

Stir-fry a colander full of washed, young nettle tops until wilted. In a separate pan, fry a finely chopped leek and two or three rashers of chopped bacon. Add a cup of pinhead oatmeal, two cups of water or stock, and the nettles. Add salt

and a generous dollop of ground black pepper. You can add other seasonings – for true foragers, the dried, ground roots of clove root (*Geum urbanum*, also known as herb bennet) work well and as it's a weed, most people are only too happy to dig it up from the garden. Tie up in a pudding or clootie dumpling bag, or press mixture into a pudding basin and cover. Place in a pan of water and simmer on very low heat until the oatmeal is cooked.

NETTLE-STUFFED RAVIOLI

I discovered this dish in a Tuscan restaurant that served a Sunday banquet of twenty-three courses, most of which involved some kind of weed. It was amazing.

You can buy fresh pasta sheets to make your own fresh ravioli parcels, or the dedicated can make their own using pasta flour (I tried it and it is quite hard work flattening the stuff sufficiently). For the nettle stuffing, mix cooked, chopped nettle tops with an equal quantity of soft cream cheese, and season with grated nutmeg and sea salt to taste (maybe none). Allow to cool a bit before adding to pasta pillowcase. Seal the parcels by brushing the edges of the pasta with beaten egg or milk. You have to boil them to cook them, of course.

NETTLE PORRIDGE

Back to Scotland, where we know Samuel Pepys was served nettle porridge on his travels in the Highlands. That recipe has not survived but judicious experimentation with cooking chopped nettles in butter, then adding water, medium oatmeal and a pinch of salt and simmering for a few minutes, yielded an interesting porridge with which to start the day. Try it

served with cream, or make nettle brose, which is delicious and much quicker. The old recipe quoted by Jane Cheape in *Hand to mouth: The Traditional Food of the Scottish Islands* may in fact be the very sort of porridge
Pepys was served as the terms 'porridge' and 'brose' were used rather interchangeably in the past.

> *Put an apron full of nettles in a vessel. Cover them with boiling water. When cold, strip the leaves from the stalks and wash the leaves in cold water. Boil in a pot, covered with water, for twenty minutes. Pour out the liquid. Add a piece of butter and a handful of meal, beat and serve hot. People ought to eat seven meals of nettles every year.*

An easier and more modern recipe for nettle brose follows.

NETTLE BROSE (*For one person*)

Pluck a handful of young nettle shoots and chop them. Scissors do this job well. Place in a small pan and cover them with about 1cm water. Bring to the boil and simmer for two or three minutes. Add a pinch of salt, black pepper, and a small knob of butter. Remove from the heat and stir in a tablespoonful of medium oatmeal and a scatter of pinhead (too much is hard on the teeth). Keep stirring until the mixture forms a thick paste. If it is too thin add a little more oatmeal, if too thick, add some boiling water. Eat immediately: this is an unusual and excellent breakfast for a spring morning.

NETTLE PESTO

Fuggo King

Pick lovely young shoots of nettle by your preferred method,

grasping or gloves! Toast some of last year's saved hazelnuts – use about half the quantity of the nettles (by volume rather than weight). Also use a little oil if you wish, or some wild garlic leaves, which work well and give a wonderful fragrance and flavour. Now you must choose between some serious elbow work in a large pestle and mortar (so that no stinging parts are uncrushed), or the food mixer option. As you mix, keep an eye on the consistency and add extra untoasted nuts for an oily brew. It keeps well in cool jars for a couple of weeks, but you will have eaten it all by then! Try it on toast or used as the base for pasta sauces.

ELDER OR BOURTREE

Sambucus nigra

The elder tree, which is often a many-stemmed bush with deeply furrowed bark and distinctive-smelling grey-green leaves, grows wild in most of Lowland Scotland, though not in the far north. It blossoms from late May until well into June. The flowers are like flat cauliflower heads: lots of little star-shaped florets arranged in a plate shape, perhaps one big enough to accommodate a piece of buttered toast. The colour of the flowers varies from a pale cream to a lemony yellow and the stem supporting the florets can be almost any shade of green or deep red. These flowers pump out a sherbet-like scent that varies in volume from tree to tree and is stronger in warm sunshine. It is one of the most powerfully scented wild flowers and can be used to make various drinks.

Elderberries are late to ripen to a very dark red, nearly black. It is usually not until October, or even November, before they are ready to pick. When ripe they are like tiny wee balloons filled with thick, purple juice with a nutty seed in the middle. They hang in alluring bunches, like miniature grapes. From

across a field, the bunches appear as black holes in the space/ time continuum as opposed to just a dark shadow in a bush. You need to know this before you set off over the barbed wire fence with your long hook, bucket and bags.

Habitat

People say elders will grow anywhere, though in fact they only take hold where it suits them. They are opportunistic plants that often spring up in cleared woodland, although hedgerows are probably the most familiar habitat. The bourtree seems to like to grow up things, especially walls, though even a post will give a bigger bush. They particularly like protection from the south-west, such as an old steading wall, and thrive amid waste: if there is some asbestos and broken-up concrete, the elder will be there, shooting up along a fence, up a bank, on light or sandy soils as they do not favour wet ground.

They seem susceptible to the weather and don't like it too wet or too dry. In unfavourable conditions a healthy-looking bush can suddenly die. This type of weather stress in a bush reveals itself with one healthy branch turning yellow and dying, followed by another one and another until the whole bush is dead.

Uses

The flowers make lovely drinks. Using lemon juice and sugary water, Cairn O' Mohr make a non-alcoholic sparkling drink. They also ferment it into an intensely flavoured wine, good on its own, but also useful for blending with oak leaves to make a lighter flavoured drink.

At home the flowers can be made into delicious wines,

‘champagne’, cordials and vinegar. They may also be coated in batter and fried (elderflower fritters). The berries serve to make wine, cordial, puddings and medicinal teas and syrups (see p175 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild for the many medicinal properties of elder).

Elderberries have numerous other practical uses. They yield a good blue-black dye. You can make whistles out of the hollow sticks, or just use them as sticks (good for pointing at things). They seemingly make the most powerful wands (see Harry Potter), and rubbing the leaves on your skin makes a good midge repellant, if you can stand the smell.

Blackbirds, fieldfares and pigeons love to eat the berries, and goldfinches will nest in an elder tree. Jew’s ear fungus thrives on its old wood, giving you another potentially useful harvest.

Harvesting

That scent of the flowers in the air is the signal to go out and pick them. The small, paler heads seem to have the sweeter fragrance and although they are much more time consuming to pick, they make the best quality wines and cordials. Once you start picking elderflowers and smother yourself into the bush, your sense of smell is soon overcome and there is almost something hypnotic going on: when you are in the ‘elderflower zone’, you can quickly escape into a dreamland where the picking becomes automatic.

If you squeeze or twist the heads at the neck the whole head comes off as a piece and can go straight into the bucket.

Elder surrounds itself with security: nettles, bramble, rose, hawthorn, gorse are attracted to them (and even barbed wire fences!). Nettles and elders seem to like one another, maybe

because the nettle root system loosens up the soil, and elder roots like to breathe. To navigate the elder security system you have to be prepared to bash through nettles and get used to the stinging (it's warming), pick your way through brambles, and unhook yourself from wild roses. When you have to negotiate hawthorn, do it backwards and if you encounter gorse you have, bravely, to 'float' in, being cautious about stepping over them and placing your feet on solid ground rather than on tangles of branches. It's worth the pain as the elder trees growing in the middle of gorse can be good heavy producers.

The natural elderberry diaspora is such that a new tree can often be spotted from the one you're picking from and thus the elder picker moves in short dashes across the land. A certain uncertainty of the exact pattern of land ownership under the feet helps to hasten the picking. Elderberries are much heavier than the flowers and a good bush will often draw you far away from the road, which can mean a long carry out. If you collect a big harvest, be prepared to carry heavy binliners full of berries over your shoulders, usually over wet, choppy ground.

Ron Gillies

Recipes

For elderflower wine and spiced elderberry wine recipes, see p146 and p147 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.

GOOSEBERRY AND ELDERFLOWER JAM

Be aware of elder flowering and of gooseberry ripening times. If the two are not going to coincide, collect a dozen or so flowering heads of elder when they are in full bloom, bag

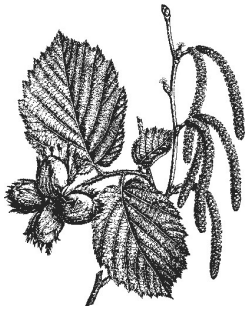
them and freeze them until the gooseberries are ready to pick. At its best, this jam has a transcendent flavour, reminiscent of muscatel grapes rather than the humble goosegog.

2.25kg/5lb gooseberries

2.75kg/6lb sugar

850ml/1.5 pints water

Simmer the gooseberries with the elderflowers wrapped in muslin (unless you don't mind florets in the jam) in the water until the fruit is completely soft. Remove the flowers before adding the sugar, then stir until dissolved. Increase the heat, boil until setting point is reached and bottle in sterilised jars.



HAZEL

Corylus avellana

Known in Gaelic as *Col* or *Caltuinn*, this is such a common tree in Scotland that it needs little description. It is usually multi-stemmed and shrubby, but can grow up to nine metres tall if left uncoppiced. The light green leaves are alternate, saw-toothed with a pointed tip and a covering of fine hairs. Leaves grow up to 10cm long and are broad with an irregular outline. The scaly bark is light brown with faintly yellow breathing pores and often seems to have a golden glow in the soft light under the tree canopy. Nuts grow in attractive clusters of up to four each, partly enclosed in overlapping leafy bracts. Stems naturally grow from a wide base, or stool, and when they are coppiced (cut back to ground level) this stool will grow bigger as new stems shoot close to the cut. Thus an old stool can have very many stems. The familiar long, yellow catkin or lamb tail is the male flower, whilst female flowers are small, red and grow from the stem like tiny red sea anemones.

Habitat

Common hazel grows throughout Britain generally in mixed woodland, particularly oak and ash. It can tolerate a canopy of taller trees, although it can also be found in distinctive 'nut woods' which often still bear that name. It can be said to be native to every county in Scotland, although it is less common in heavily grazed land like the Borders, where it hangs on in cleuchs and on the sides of steeper hills.

Uses

Pliant hazel rods have been employed since prehistoric times for a variety of uses: shelter building, boats, weapons, fencing, hedging and for thatching. In house or hut building, hazel wands can be woven to form a 'wattle' walling between the upright posts supporting the roof. The wattle can then be rendered wind- and weatherproof by applying a daub mix of clay, straw, sand and dung on both sides, and pressing the mix hard into the wattle so it meets in the middle and dries hard. It can then be limewashed to make it even more weatherproof. There are a surprising number of old farm buildings in Scotland that retain small sections of such walls, many of which have been recorded by Becky Little. Her work for Historic Scotland, *Building with Earth in Scotland*, remains the best description of what was done in the past and how such simple building, with hazel and mud, can be done today.

A mix of hazel and bramble is often used for hedging, and the rods can be half cut and bent over to lay the hedge. New shoots will quickly surge up from the prostrate stems and make it stockproof.

Hazel can be woven to make the frame of a small round boat

known as a ‘currach’, or coracle. An ash seat is fitted across the middle, the hazel frame is then covered with animal hide or a canvas and coated in tar. The word ‘currach’ can also refer to a basket or creel, many of which were framed in hazel, some fishing creels being entirely fashioned from it.

To ensure a steady supply of hazel rods for all these purposes, trees were coppiced in late winter or early spring before the sap rises. Hazel is usually coppiced in a seven-year rotation. Archaeological evidence from Bouldnor Cliff, a submerged site off the Isle of Wight, suggests that this practice is at least 8,000 years old, making it the earliest form of husbandry found in Britain. We don’t have the direct evidence that this was going on in Scotland at the time but it is perfectly possible that it was. Hazelnuts have certainly been found in the post holes of a Mesolithic shelter excavated at Dunbar.

Hazel finds another important use in thatching. A thatching spar is made from a hazel rod cut to about 60cm long, split and pointed using a billhook. It is then twisted to create a staple
that is used to peg down the thatching material. Straight rods of hazel are laid along ‘sets’ of straw on the roof and secured by the spars. Spars and hazel rods are also used to create the traditional patterning on the ridge of the thatched roof.

Hazel coppiced in the winter can be used all year round, but dried stored hazel will require soaking for twenty-four hours to make it pliant.

Finally, of course, hazelnuts are delicious and really worth the effort of collecting when there is a good crop. They can be ground and added to cake and biscuit recipes, used in muesli, or nibbled as a snack.

Harvesting

The very edible and nutritious nuts, if harvested before the squirrels get them, are delicious and will keep well. With the spread of grey squirrels in particular, timing the harvest is critical. You must wait until the kernels have formed and filled the nuts, but if you dally too long the bushes will be stripped, especially if the number of hazels in the neighbourhood is low. Collecting nuts that have already fallen is an easy approach. A proportion of them will be empty but these can be separated from the full ones by a simple process of submerging the whole collection in a bucket and stirring. The empty nuts will float and can be discarded. Dry the rest of the crop well, and remove the leafy bracts from them before you store them, or they will go mouldy.

Acquiring properly ripe nuts is equally important if they are to be used as seed rather than food. Seed collectors usually frequent woods where the number of hazels outstrips the squirrels' ability to raid them.

Hazelnuts were probably the most significant gathered food in prehistoric times because they keep so well. Hunter-gatherer life in Scotland would have been pretty nigh untenable without them! Store them in their shells in cool conditions (in the Mesolithic period, this was probably a pit) and they will keep from one season to the next.

Jools Cox

HEATHER

Calluna vulgaris, Erica cinerea, Erica tetralix

Heathers – or *Fraoch* in Gaelic – are stubby, evergreen plants with tangled, multi-stemmed branches that sport varying shades of purple flowers in the late summer. All varieties are slow-growing and long-lived. They can grow up to 60cm high in favourable conditions, becoming very woody at the base.

The tough, wiry stems of the most common heather, *Calluna vulgaris*, support pairs of leaves that are stalkless. The small flowers, usually purple but sometimes pink or white, form loose spikes at the tops of the stems and branches. The down-turned flowers have sepals that are longer than the petals. It flowers from August to September, turning the hills and glens of Scotland to a haze of purple.

Bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) favours drier areas of woodland and bogs, so when you are out walking you can seek out the bell heather to locate a dry route. It usually starts flowering earlier than *C. vulgaris* and its darker, bell-shaped flowers can be seen from the end of June until September. Bell heather

thrives on poor sandy soil and is distinguished by having only three leaves in each whorl. In contrast, cross-leaved heather (*Erica tetralix*) likes damp places and wet hollows. It is distinguished by whorls of four thin leaves all the way up the stem that form a cross when looked at from above. It also tends to blossom earlier than the common heather.

Habitat

Heather grows on moors, heathland, and in clearings or on the edges of woodland all over Scotland, although it cannot compete with a shady canopy. Typically it is found on hill tops, steep slopes and above the 'head-dyke' that separates improved in-bye grassland from the hill pastures.

Uses

The heather *Calluna vulgaris* is also known as 'ling', coming from the Anglo Saxon *lig*, which means fire, as heather, rush and coarse grass were once used to make firelighters. Another use for heather is found in the name *Calluna*, the Greek word meaning 'to brush'.

Heather used to perform many essential functions in the home. Bunches were tied together to form brushes, brooms and pot scourers. The latter, if made with the still-pliant shoots of recently dead heather, bound tightly together, are very effective. The plant can also be woven to form attractive baskets. In earlier times it was used to stuff mattresses, or to create what is said to be the most comfortable of all beds. For this a wooden frame was made, high enough to accommodate the length of full-grown heather stalks. These were cut and crammed into the frame upright, as if they were growing. Lying on such a bed, cradled by the growing-tips of the plants

and surrounded by the sweet smell, as if you were out on the hill, must surely have beaten lying on any modern factory-made mattress.

Heather's other domestic uses were numerous. Being freely available, it was used for animal bedding, woven hedging, quick thatching for shelters and summer shielings, and, very importantly, for rope making. Ropes for holding down thatch, for securing animals and boats, and for many other purposes around the farm or croft were all home-made until late in the nineteenth century, and heather was one of the most frequently used materials. Of a winter evening, Highlanders carved heather roots to fashion knife handles for the Scottish dirk. In summer the flowers were used to make an orange dye, still employed by those who specialise in vegetable dying.

Tall 'ling' heather has been used in Scotland for thatching for centuries as it tends to be straighter than the other species. It is
still used to provide a long-lasting, attractive, rustic roof covering, with good insulation values. Heather thatch can last up to a hundred years, even in exposed situations. Sometimes heather is used as a hardwearing topcoat over a coat of the softer rush or straw. Heather is also used to clad walls, especially those on the weathered side of a building, as it is very hardwearing. Heather can be fixed to the wall with clay or peat, or tied to a wattle wall in overlapping bunches.

Heather used for thatching must grow in close beds to ensure a thin stem between 50cm and 60cm, and must have a bushy top that is not too forked. With modern farming and grazing methods there are few places where heather grows to this specification, but it can be found in fire breaks of forestry

planting, and in young plantations. As more peat bogs are put over to carbon sequestration, instead of being grazed and drained, there could be a better supply to fulfil thatching requirements.

As heather is an evergreen plant it provides year-round ground cover and food for many forms of wildlife. Birds eat the ripe seeds, many mammals graze the young shoots, and grouse feed on the soft new growth. Bees love the nectar and from it make dark, delicious heather honey, which is one of the best.

Harvesting

Harvest heather from late August until the end of February, by cutting it with secateurs at the base of the plant. Tie into bundles on site for easy transportation. It can be used fresh or dried and kept for later use.

Jools and Jem Cox

Recipes

The culinary uses of heather are many, from seasoning to brewing. Sprinkled on roast meats, poultry and game, the fresh or dried flowers will give off the hillside aroma of moorland. Ice cream drizzled with heather honey and a few flowers sprinkled over the top makes a delightful dessert. And if you collect flowers on a sunny day and infuse them in hot water with a sprig of lemon balm, you have a delicious tea. It is pretty to look at – pale green with mauve florets – so it's almost a tartan tea!

HEATHER ALE

The flowering tops of heather were used for making ale by the Picts and Vikings. It is a craft that has been revived in Scotland with an excellent, commercially produced ale called *Fraoch* (pronounced 'freuch'). You can make a similar home-brew if you look up a recipe by Alastair Wallace on *The Guardian* website. Alternatively, you can use this traditional recipe from *The Scots Kitchen* by Marian McNeil, which makes a lighter drink, more like traditional home-made ginger beer.

Flowering heather tips (enough to fill a large soup pot)

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

10g/0.5 oz ground ginger

5g/0.25 oz hops (gather or grow your own, or buy from brewing shop) 225g/8 oz honey

Brewing yeast or a barm (1 tablespoon dried baking yeast dissolved in 275ml/0.5 pint warm water with a little sugar and left in a warm place to ferment)

Boil the heather tips in the water for an hour. Strain into a clean vessel. Add the ground ginger, hops and honey and stir until latter dissolves. Cool to just above blood heat, then add the yeast or barm. Cover with a clean cloth and leave in a warm place for a day. Skim off froth and either syphon or carefully decant the ale into screw-top bottles that have been sterilised with Milton or metabisulphate. Screw down caps, but not too firmly, and place bottles in a covered cardboard box somewhere where a minor explosion would not be a disaster. Try after three days.

CHAPTER THREE

SALADS, LEAVES AND GREENS

Spring is the main season for wild greens, often called ‘pot herbs’ in the past, and for leaves to use as salads. There are plants to nibble and taste and others to harvest and use freely. How you come to regard them will depend on your individual preference, although there are some, like wild garlic, Fat Hen, sorrel, and marsh samphire, which stand out as particularly useful and palatable to most people. Follow the recommendations for cooking that are suggested by the species champions and you should find that you have very satisfactory wild foods that will help you through the ‘hungry gap’ at the end of spring, when locally grown vegetables are hard to come by.

Some of the entries here contain information about uses beyond the edible value of the leaves or roots. This is usually the case when the species is not mentioned in any other chapter of the book. When it does have other mentions, as in the case of chickweed, dandelion and several other species, then a cross-reference will be given, so that you can find out more about how to prepare a tea, or a home remedy.

Few of the recommended plants have serious lookalikes that could fool you into consuming anything poisonous. If there is one, it is mentioned in the entry, but using your sense of smell, combined with a good reference book if you are in any doubt, should avoid problems.

Liver fluke is a potential hazard from any plants collected from marshy ground or the edges of water courses. If the plants are to be cooked, this need not concern you, but avoid taking saladings from such areas.

At the end of the chapter there’s a helpful section on those plants that you can use as aromatic seasonings to liven up

your best dishes.

BISHOP'S WEED OR GROUND ELDER

Aegopodium podagraria

The young shoots of bishop's weed can start to emerge as early as January, as many gardeners know to their despair! It is an invasive perennial, multiplying by means of spreading underground roots (tellingly known as 'devil's guts'). It is difficult to get rid of, because any bit of root left when you dig it up will instantly grow a shoot and spread. But remember this plant was once valued as a pot herb. It is believed to have been introduced for that purpose in medieval times. Because of its medicinal use in the treatment of arthritic conditions and specifically gout, bishop's weed also bears the names goutweed and herb Gerard, after St. Gerard, who people used to pray to for relief from gout. It was popularly grown in monastery gardens (for the relief of gouty bishops perhaps?) from which base it looks set to take over Scotland.

Habitat

Bishop's weed is still found mostly in gardens, or in and near

places where gardens once were. You'll also find it by many waterways and roadsides, where it has travelled in delight. It is far from uncommon, and recognised by the pinnate compound leaves that look very like those of the elder tree – hence the other common name, ground elder. The flowers are white umbels, and very pretty.

Uses

Bishop's weed has a distinctive 'green', slightly aniseed, flavour, which can be really enjoyable as the first fresh greens of spring. The tiny, scarcely opened leaves are excellent in salads, but larger ones benefit from being cooked. The flavour might take some getting used to, so in the period before you become utterly addicted to it, try cooking it mixed with cabbage or milder greens.

The fresh leaves also make a pleasant tea, which is slightly sedative. This is the best way to take bishop's weed internally. The leaves, stems and roots can also be made into a poultice and applied to joints affected by gout – as well as burns, stings and haemorrhoids.

The use of bishop's weed as ground cover in the garden, for which it seems to have a vocation, seems greatly under-appreciated!

Harvesting

Pick the youngest leaves to eat raw; older leaves for greens. Pick lots because it cooks down. There are no issues regarding its conservation to bear in mind when harvesting.

Margaret Lear

Recipes

GOUT-FREE GREENS

Bishop's weed needs some care in cooking, as it is inclined to 'catch' if there is no liquid. Wash the leaves thoroughly and place in 1cm boiling water – with or without an equal amount of conventional greens. Cover, and reduce heat. Cook for seven minutes. Drain the greens, and stir-fry for three minutes in butter.

SPRING SALAD BOWL

To make the freshest salad ever use young tops of bishop's weed (avoiding the stalks), garlic mustard leaves, ramsons (wild garlic) leaves and wild rocket. Mix all the shredded leaves together, and add some flowers: ramsons flowers if the leaves have gone over; broom buds (not opened flowers, they are inedible); primrose or
cowslip flowers. Finally, put in your own salad dressing. There are quite a few bitter spring herbs in this, so a honey dressing is useful to balance the flavours.

BISTORT

Persicaria bistorta (formerly known as Polygonum bistorta)

Delightfully invasive, the pink poker flowers of this perennial relation to dock make it one of our most attractive native plants. But that's not half the story. Preceding the flowers come strapping great pale green leaves with pointed tips, arising from sappy shoots and spreading like butter on hot toast. Bistort multiplies by underground rhizomes, and where it is found it is usually rampant. Those broad leaves make one of the best spring vegetables, and their use around the country has led to the plant having lots of synonyms – Easter ledges, passion dock, snakeweed and pudding dock to name but a few. Easterman giants is a name that derives from the French *mangeants*, coupled with our own 'Easter'. Thus it means

‘food for Easter’, so called as the green plants are available to stimulate the digestion after the Lenten fast.

Making dock pudding, and competing for the prize for the best one, is a tradition of northern England that transplants admirably to Scotland. Lent and Easter Day are the traditional times for eating dock pudding, but don’t let tradition restrict you.

Habitat

Look for bistort along road verges in semi-open situations, particularly in the south-west – but grow it in shady places where it can romp away to its heart’s delight.

Uses

The leaves of bistort are, of course, its main attraction for the wild harvester, being edible, plentiful and tasty – though maybe they are best mixed with other ingredients rather than eating them on their own. Cooked like spinach, with a handful of nettles or ground elder, they are an excellent vegetable. The roots can also be eaten. Bistort also has many medicinal and healing uses, being highly astringent. The roots contain high levels of tannin.

Harvesting

As it grows by the roadside, be wary of what/who else may be using the verge as a toilet or dump for road salt! Gather the fresh leaves from a clean spot, and wash well. There is no problem regarding scarcity, and bistort has the happy knack of supplying fresh shoots right through the summer. Older leaves can be a bit tough, less tasty, and full of oxalic acid, which is no good for you if you have arthritis, but this can be

much reduced by cooking.

Margaret Lear

Recipes

DOCK PUDDING

There are many recipes, most of which use pearl barley or wheat as the filler. Not being too keen on either but addicted to oats in every form, I developed this Scottish version.

275g/10oz bistort leaves (approximately a colander full)

170g/6oz oatmeal

1 egg (beaten)

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Several leaves of lady's mantle and ramsons (wild garlic), together with nettle tops as available. *(Note: traditional recipes for soups like this often include a handful of young comfrey leaves, which taste good, but they are now not recommended for anything other than external use as they contain a carcinogen and can harm the liver.)*

Wash leaves well and steam like spinach in a heavy, covered pan until tender. Chop finely, and add the oatmeal; the mixture should have enough liquid to soak into the oatmeal. Add one beaten egg, and season with black pepper, sea salt, and mix well. Transfer to a greased pudding basin, cover and place in a saucepan of water. Bring to the boil and cook for thirty minutes or so until set. Allow to cool slightly before turning out on to a plate. On Easter Day it's nice to garnish your dock pudding with a few edible wild primrose flowers.

Feel free to vary the edible leaves and seasonings and replace oats with any other grain or similar – but the basis must be bistort!

DOLMADES WITH A DIFFERENCE

Large-leaved plants like bistort can make excellent substitutes for vine leaves and can be wrapped around parcels of meat, rice, pine nuts or any other ingredients to make your own version of the classic Greek dish, dolmades. Other leaves I have used in this way are garlic mustard, ramsons, sorrel and lady's mantle. You can make any stuffing you like – here's a vegetarian version:

8–12 decent-sized bistort leaves

1 onion (small)

1 garlic clove

3 tomatoes (skinned and chopped)

85g/3oz brown rice

85g/3oz green, brown or puy lentils (soaked for several hours)

Sea salt, paprika and generous amounts of herbs such as thyme, savory, basil, oregano – or others to taste

Wash and then cook the rice and lentils together for approximately thirty-five minutes till cooked. Meanwhile fry the chopped onion gently for five minutes in olive oil, then add the crushed garlic. Shortly after add the tomatoes and simmer for
ten to fifteen minutes. Add cooked rice and lentils, seasoning

and herbs. Oil a shallow ovenproof dish. Place a spoonful of the stuffing in the centre of each washed leaf and wrap the leaf around it like a parcel (the style of wrap varies according to shape and flexibility of leaf, but try to enclose on all sides!). Place each wrap side down in the dish. Sprinkle some more oil over the top and cook in the oven at 150˚C/300˚F/ Reg 2 degrees for twenty to twenty-five minutes. Check the dolmades aren't burning on top from time to time – you can cover with aluminium foil for part of the cooking time to avoid this. Different leaves have different ignition thresholds.

BITTER VETCH

Lathyrus linifolius (also known as Lathyrus montanus)

Also known as heath pea, this plant is a real gem. We have around forty members of the pea family native in Scotland, ranging from the thuggish gorse to tiny, weedy medicks, but bitter vetch is a real classic of Scottish foraging.

The emerald green plants stand upright to about 20cm and have small, but distinctive, wings on the stems that you can feel by rolling the stem in your fingers. Leaves are alternate and compound with little half-arrow-shaped stipules at the base and two to four pairs of blade-like or slender leaflets on each leaf. Unlike other vetchlings and vetches, this species has no grasping tendril, but you can often find a tiny point at the tip of each leaf
that shows you where a tendril might have been in its climbing relations. Flower heads have a short stalk (3–6cm) before a loose cluster of about five, small, pink-purple pea flowers appear from late May to August. The flowers often

bob about in the wind and stand out nicely against the background vegetation. Once you get your eye in, you can also spot it from the short (4cm), reddish-brown pea pods, turning black.

Although plants die back for the winter, the aerial parts remain almost through until the following spring, when new growth starts coming up, so there are only a few of the deepest winter months when you might not be able to find it.

Habitat

Bitter vetch is fairly common in acid grasslands and in heaths – the kind of slightly windswept places you expect to find sheep huddling for shelter.

Uses

Young shoots of this, and many other herbaceous legumes such as white clover and some of the vetches, can be eaten as fresh, pea-flavoured additions to a salad. Be very careful though, especially by the sea and in mountains, as some of our native vetches and other legumes are very rare. It is probably wise to avoid the seed pods, too, as seeds of some legume species are toxic and could be harmful if eaten in quantity.

Most of the forager's interest in bitter vetch lies beneath the soil. They form roughly spherical tubers about 0.5 to 2cm diameter. In Gaelic Scotland until the mid-1900s, these were a valuable snackfood, dug up and chewed while you worked. They have a sweetish taste somewhere between fresh peas and mild liquorice and although they have a lovely crunch, older tubers can be a bit fibrous.

They were used as a flavouring for liquors (whiskies) and also allegedly used in production of a liquor in their own right. Experiments by William Milliken using vodka as a base and infusing a small handful of tubers (enough to cover the bottom of the bottle) yielded a very pleasant flavour. The various accounts of Enlightenment scholars such as Martin Martin and
James Robertson suggest these tubers were wonderfully versatile, and represent one of Scotland's very own home forages. They report how people savoured the liquorice-like flavour, and munched the tubers to expel wind and, remarkably (or wishfully), to prevent drunkenness.

Harvesting

The tubers are not difficult to gather and can almost be dug up with the bare hands if the plant is in an open soil. A penknife or trowel can be helpful, though! Following down from the base of the shoot will take you to a tuber, and long, quite tough rhizomes connect each tuber. Of course, it is **absolutely essential** to obtain the landowner's permission and limit collecting to very small numbers. Make sure to leave at least half the number of tubers you collect to allow regeneration. Indeed, bitter vetch is a great candidate for controlled domestication, as seeds germinate readily and it can be grown in a large pot, or in a wild bed or woodland corner of a garden.

Gregory Kenicer

BURDOCK

Arctium pubens and other species of Arctium

There are two main species of burdock in Scotland, the common and the lesser. A third, *A. lappa*, or great burdock, is usually
found in south and mid-Britain, but it may crop up in Scotland occasionally. All of them are edible and bear similar seed heads. It is these which inspired George de Mestral, the inventor of Velcro, as they are covered with tiny hooks that latch on to the clothes of unwary passers-by. Common burdock grows up to 150cm with large oval, slightly heart-shaped leaves with pronounced ribs, reminiscent of downy rhubarb leaves. The flowers, bearing a passing resemblance to a soft thistle, are held upright and the seed heads will often last all winter.

Burdock furnishes the annual Burryman Festival, held every

August in South Queensferry since at least 1687. Here a local man, the burryman, is covered with burdock heads (around 11,000 in all) and parades through the town to bring good fortune.

Habitat

Burdock can be found on rough ground, field and woodland edges throughout most of Scotland, except the Highlands.

Uses

The main stalks of young burdock plants can be peeled and eaten raw in salads, or boiled and eaten like asparagus, although they taste more like their relative, the artichoke. The leaf stalks can also be used when young; later they are too stringy. Candied in sugar, like angelica, the young stalks were once traditional sweets.

In Japan the young taproots are called *gobo* and considered a staple delicacy. The roots are high in vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, and can be cut into matchsticks and stir-fried with soy sauce, or parboiled and pickled in vinegar, to be eaten with sushi. Burdock roots have a slightly sweet flavour and crunchy texture, a little more chewy than most root vegetables, and are often used like salsify. Like dandelion root, the roast and ground roots can also be used as a coffee substitute.

The leaves can be used but take care not to confuse them with foxglove, as the rosettes of young leaves on immature plants are not dissimilar. They are too bitter to be used as a vegetable but can be wrapped round fish, potatoes or burdock roots prior to roasting and will impart a mild, cucumber-like flavour, particularly to fish.

It's worth allowing this plant to flower, because it is incredibly attractive to bees, and will supply them with nectar and pollen.

The roots are used to treat a wide range of skin complaints and disorders, and often form part of 'detox' formulae. For further information about burdock's medicinal uses, see p183.

Harvesting

It is best to harvest burdock in the springtime before the main spike is at its full height, and certainly before the flower head develops fully. If you want to use the roots, harvest only first- or second-year plants as old specimens become woody.

Monica Wilde

Recipes

BURDOCK ROAST

Use three or four burdock roots, three or four small beetroots, some parsnips and some turnips. Chop into similar sized pieces, and toss in olive oil and garlic salt. Roast in a moderately hot oven until tender. Second-year burdock roots may need to be parboiled first.

DANDELION AND BURDOCK

1 litre/2 pints dandelion flower heads

2 roots of young burdock

1kg/2.2lb sugar

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

2 lemons (zest and juice)

Trim sepals from the dandelion heads (if you don't want a bitter tang, but leave them on if you like it). Scrub the burdock roots and chop them into fairly small pieces. Place all of the ingredients (except the sugar) into a brewing bucket and pour on boiling water. Cover well and leave for a day.

Strain the liquid through muslin or a jelly bag placed in a sieve, into a clean bucket. Draw out some of the liquid into a large saucepan, add the sugar, heat and stir until dissolved. Return this syrup to the fermenting bucket, cover and allow to cool. Next day, pour or siphon into sterilised bottles with screw-top lids, which should also have been sterilised. You can use metabisulphate for the glass bottles (or put them in a warm oven like you would for sterilising jam jars) but the lids need to be scalded.

Leave for about a month. The result should be a sweet, fizzy drink that is only very slightly alcoholic, so is refreshing and suitable for children.

CHICKWEED

Stellaria media

Chickweed is a small, unassuming plant with minute, white, star-like flowers (hence the common name starwort) and a fresh, mild, lettuce-like flavour. In the rich soil of gardens it can grow tall, especially if supported by pea rows, from which it is impossible to remove. Present all year round in sheltered gardens, it dies back in exposed places. During the winter you particularly notice its weather forecasting tendencies as the tiny oval leaves fold tightly shut when cold or wet weather is on the way.

Habitat

Chickweed grows almost everywhere, especially on cultivated or farm land where the soil has been disturbed. In Scotland it can be found up to about 940m/3,000ft, though mountain specimens tend to be tiny.

Uses

Chickweed is a delicious ingredient in soups, salads,

sandwiches, steamed like spinach and in any dish where a pot herb is required. It can be made into pesto, folded into omelettes or liquidised into a salad dressing with olive oil, garlic, lemon and crème fraiche. Try chopping it as a garnish, like cress. It is without a doubt one of the most versatile of plants in the forager's larder.

Bunches of it can also be juiced and a capful added to fruit juices and smoothies as a health drink. Only small amounts of the concentrated juice should be consumed as large quantities are reported to produce biliousness, headaches or rheumatic pain, which it can also actually ease when taken in small amounts. The juice can also be applied to insect bites to cool the stings. In the Highlands chickweed tea was traditionally taken as a slimming drink.

Chickweed contains vitamins B6, B12, C and D, and beta-carotene and also a variety of minerals such as iron, calcium, potassium, phosphorous, zinc and manganese. The benefits of chickweed can even be extended to poultry as 'chick feed' is loved by birds, both caged and wild, and is also highly nutritious for them.

Chickweed is known as the soothing herb as it has a very cooling effect on the skin and so can be used to treat skin irritations, such as eczema and rashes. For more information about its medicinal qualities see p183 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild.

Harvesting

Pick the green stems at any time they seem fresh and lush, avoiding older, wilted ones with yellowing leaves.

Monica Wilde

DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale

Dandelions need hardly any introduction with their puffball seed heads or clocks and their brilliant yellow flowers. They herald the spring and provide a vital early pollen source for bees and butterflies. The name originally came from *dent de lion* (Welsh: *dant y llew*) or 'lion's tooth' as the serrated edges of the leaf do indeed resemble one. In France they have a different name, *pissenlit* (Italian: *piscialletto*), literally meaning 'wet the bed', paying tribute to the dandelion's diuretic properties!

Habitat

They are widespread across Scotland and particularly thrive on mown roadside verges where councils have decimated other wild plants.

Uses

Fresh dandelion greens are a welcome and vitamin-rich spring vegetable but inclined to be bitter due to sesquiterpenes found in their milky sap. The acrid sap from the stalk can be applied

directly to warts over a few weeks to remove them. It is far less concentrated and less bitter in young leaves before flowering, and in plants growing in wet, shady areas or in long grass. You can also blanch dandelions by tying up, or placing a flowerpot over, the emerging leaves, which makes them less bitter but also less nutritious.

In a mixed salad, up to a fifth of lightly chopped dandelion leaves can be added without the bitterness being noticeable. Instead it adds a piquant note, enhancing the overall taste. When cooking them, chop into 3cm pieces, add to boiling water and simmer for five minutes. If they taste bitter, you may need to drain them, refresh the water and boil them for a further five minutes. Then add butter and seasoning as if you were serving spinach. Dandelion leaves are also nice sautéed or wilted in a frying pan with onions or pancetta, or stirred into pasta with ricotta. Unopened dandelion buds can also be pickled in vinegar or deep fried in batter for a tasty tempura snack.

The root is also useful. Chopped into small pieces and roasted in the oven, ground dandelion root powder can be used as a caffeine-free hot drink to replace tea or coffee. Roast dandelion root can also be used to flavour creams and ice creams, giving a kind of coffee-peanut flavour. Or you can mix it with spices to create an aromatic meat rub. The vibrant yellow flowers can be used to make a dandelion wine, the whole plant used to make dandelion beer.

Dandelions contain vitamins A, B, C, D and K, calcium, iron, manganese, potassium and zinc. It is the levels of these that are surprising. Spinach, which we all know is good for us, contains 8,000 IU of vitamin A per 100g, whereas dandelion leaf contains 14,000 IU. Dandelions also have many

medicinal uses, with their diuretic properties harnessed in 'detox' formulae. For more information about these, see p174 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild.

Harvesting

Cut the whole rosette just below the base if you want the plant to grow back. Go deeper if you are removing a weed. Choose plants that have not yet flowered – commonest in early spring, although chopped off dandelions regenerate all year. Dig the roots at any time of year.

Monica Wilde

Recipes

See p48 for a dandelion and burdock drink recipe.

GARLIC MUSTARD OR HEDGE GARLIC

Alliara petiolata

This white-flowered member of the cabbage family can be annual or biennial depending on when the seed germinates. It is also called Jack-by-the-Hedge in some parts, but the name garlic mustard really sums up the unexpected combination of flavours you get from the large, heart-shaped, light green leaves.

Habitat

It really does grow by hedges, and on the edges of woods. It can also fortuitously spring up in gardens when the soil is disturbed. It prefers moist soil and light shade.

Uses

This is a great salad plant, bearing its flavoursome leaves early in the season. The mild garlic flavour also comes out when the leaves are added, finely chopped, to sauces, but tends to vanish when cooked.

Garlic mustard may also be used medicinally, being good for bronchial conditions and asthma when taken internally. It speeds up healing in skin conditions and minor wounds when applied externally as a poultice. Like bishop's weed, it has been used to treat gout.

This plant will attract orange-tip butterflies, whose caterpillars use it as a food source.

Harvesting

Select young, but good-sized leaves from biennial plants (those on the flowering stems are smaller and inclined to be tough). Wash thoroughly. As this plant can set seed right through the year, picking is not restricted to springtime. Garlic mustard is not uncommon, but always leave flowering shoots to set seed.

Margaret Lear

Recipes

GARLIC MUSTARD SAUCE

110g/4oz margarine or butter

110g/4oz flour

1 litre/1.75 pints milk or cream

5–6 large leaves of garlic mustard

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

This method makes a Roux-based white sauce. Melt the butter slowly and add the flour, a dessert spoon at a time, stirring continuously. Remove from heat and add milk or cream (best if warmed), a little at a time. Return to the heat and stir until thickened. Finely chop the garlic mustard and stir into the sauce with the sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Thin down the sauce with a little more milk if too thick. Don't allow the sauce to boil (if using cream). This sauce is a perfect accompaniment to egg or white fish dishes.

GOOD KING HENRY & FAT HEN

Chenopodium bonus-henricus and C. album

Good King Henry is a non-native but well naturalised plant that is worth cherishing and encouraging in the unimproved areas of a garden. It thrives on rich soil so will do well near the compost
heap or in a hen yard. It can also form part of the herb layer in a forest garden as it is perennial and almost indestructible once it is established, self-seeding wherever it can find open soil. It is one of the spinach family but don't be deceived into eating its arrowhead-shaped, spinach-like leaves as they are bitter. It is the spire-shaped, pale green flower heads that give you tasty greens.

Habitat

Good King Henry can be found on roadsides and wasteland, around farm yards and sometimes on field edges, like its close

relatives, goosefoot, fat hen, and orache. All make useful vegetables, the latter more for their leaves than for the flowering heads, though for some tastes these leaves, too, can be a little bitter.

Uses

Depending on the size of the Good King Henry's flower heads, pick from four to eight per person. Melt a little butter in a pan and add them, stir once or twice, then add a little water. Cook rapidly, without a lid, until the water has evaporated, leaving the greens soft, steamed and buttered. This should only take a couple of minutes. Pepper lightly and enjoy them as course on their own or as an accompaniment to other dishes.

The flower heads of fat hen, which are more branched and feathery than those of Good King Henry, can be handled in the same way and benefit from the addition of a little spice. Regular mixed spice, garam masala, or nutmeg all go well with it.

The other *Chenopodia* species are better boiled twice, discarding the first pot of water after a minute of simmering, to reduce the bitterness. Butter or olive oil can then be added, or, once cooked, the leaves can be made into a salad, warm or cold.

Harvesting

The plant flowers prolifically from May, right through the summer, especially if the flowers are systematically picked. It is at its height, producing substantial heads of florets, in late May and early June, just when the garden has least to offer. With nettles and wild garlic this is it an essential resource for

the hungry gap.

GORSE OR WHIN

Ulex europaeus

Gorse can be seen in flower almost throughout the year in Scotland as there are a number of variant sub-species that flourish in differing locations. It varies in height from dwarf, low-growing, almost prostrate shrubs, to ones of up to three metres. The bright yellow, strongly coconut-scented flowers, can be used in salads, and are especially good added to scones to impart a delicate flavouring. They make a good flower wine, both dry and sweet, with a lovely yellow colour (see p148 in the Wines, Teas and Cordials chapter).

The flowers are best gathered on bright, sunny days, taking them from shoot tips on younger growth to avoid thorns, although you will still need gloves. The young green shoots and flower buds can be used to give soft green dye colours; the flowers give golds and yellows. Gorse stems can grow to reasonable thickness on old plants, but all sticks make good firewood, though fast burning, and better used in a wood stove than on an open fire. Gorse is resilient to wild fire burning, heat causing its seeds to explode from their sheaths, and scattering them quite far. This makes it an invasive plant. However, gorse has been used to good effect on poor land to increase soil fertility, since it is a leguminous plant and fixes nitrogen. Its leaf fall can also improve soils.

The young shoots of gorse make a good fodder crop: traditionally they were gathered and bruised to be fed to animals in the winter. The cover provided by this plant makes it important for a whole variety of wildlife, and its almost

non-stop flowering season means that gorse provides good foraging at all times of the year.

Les Bates

HOGWEED

Heracleum sphondylium

This native umbellifier, common on roadsides and field edges, has chunky, lobed and pointed leaves and large, white flower-heads. Some people get nervous about eating it because they have heard horror stories about its introduced cousin, giant hogweed, which causes nasty skin lesions if touched when the sun is shining. Common hogweed may also do this, but to a much lesser extent, so wear gloves to harvest the very young shoots and leaf stalks.

Habitat

Hogweed grows pretty much anywhere but is happiest in light shade, the edges of woods and waysides. It thrives in rich soil and will often be found among nettles and dockens, but can also be found growing out of a wall.

Uses

This is an epicurean wild vegetable for the hungry gap. The very young shoots, rather than the leaves, are the best part of the plant, and are a wonderful addition to pot roasts and casseroles. The shoots freeze well after blanching for two minutes.

Hogweed's thick leaf stalks are also good, and easier to process. Cut them near the base, remove any opened leaves and use a sharp knife to peel away the rather hairy outer skin, just as you might peel celery, whipping away the stringy bits. There's
no need to be too precious about it though – just get the worst off. (This same technique is used when peeling burdock leaves.) The naked stalks can be cut into sections, sautéed in butter, steamed or boiled. They are delicious. Rumour has it the roots can be eaten as well; and in times gone by hogweed had a reputation as an aphrodisiac!

Harvesting

Make sure you have the right hogweed. Giant hogweed flowers can be 40–60cm across; the leaves are enormous and much jaggier, and the stalk and stems have lurid purplish streaks. Edible hogweed looks softer and much smaller. Late spring is the best season for gathering, but new shoots can be found throughout the summer. Wearing gloves, pick fleshy stems as the well-opened, thinner stalks can be stringy, and not worth processing.

Recipes

BRAISED HOGWEED SHOOTS

Prepare the shoots as above, and cut into 10cm lengths. Melt some butter or margarine in a small pan, keeping the heat low. Fry the hogweed shoots gently for five minutes, then sprinkle with caraway seeds and a pinch of ground coriander. Stir well, add a cupful of vegetable or beef stock, and cover tightly. Cook for a further 10–15 minutes, and serve.

Margaret Lear

LIME

Tilia species

Given space, lime is a gracious and stately tree but in city streets it is often pollarded (pruned back), sometimes quite brutally. When this happens its vigour bursts forth as a mass of small twigs growing straight from the trunk, giving it a hairy or bristly appearance.

Lime buds are distinctive in the winter: shiny, red and asymmetrical. When the leaves emerge they provide the very best of tree salads. Their flavour is mild – rare in foraged saladings – and they are quite big, so it's easy to pick enough for a sandwich. If you are disappointed by them, it will either be because you dislike their cool, mucilaginous texture, or because you are unlucky enough to chance on a tree with hairy leaves. This really is a matter of chance with planted limes, as so many of them are hybrids. 'Salad' limes have leaves that are translucent, smooth, and hairless apart from an occasional downy white tuft. Hairy lime leaves are just as edible, but the feel of them in your mouth is less pleasant. Ones with white undersides tend to be papery and tough.

Good as they are in the spring, lime leaves come into their own in the summer. When all other tree leaves are tough and dark, the lime continues to produce a little new growth at its tips, especially if it has been trimmed. As in the spring, for best eating select the freshest, most translucent leaves. They are particularly useful for the forager of streets and parklands as there will usually be something good to browse well above the dogs and dirt.

Lime is worth having in a hedge for its leaves alone. As a full-size tree, the sweet-scented flowers provide a popular tea (see p137 in Wines, Teas and Cordials) and one of the nicest single-variety honeys. In July, the buzz from foragers in the canopy can be so loud it's as if a late swarm has landed there. Later, the seeds make an interesting wayside nibble, with the texture of the leaves and a little of the oiliness of a nut.

Emma Chapman

MARSH SAMPHIRE OR GLASSWORT

Salicornia europaea and other species of Salicornia

This seaside vegetable may seem out of place in a chapter primarily on leafy plants as its bright green, fleshy stems are anything but leafy. It is commonly gathered and sold at stalls near the Norfolk coast. Although formerly known in Scotland and much appreciated for its flavour, it had fallen out of favour until the recent revival of interest in unusual and wild foods. It was commonly known here as glasswort because of its past use as a source of sodium for glass making.

Habitat

This is very much a plant of salt marshes, principally in the south-west and some of the southerly Western Isles such as Colonsay,
although it does occasionally crop up on south-eastern estuaries. You are unlikely to find it north of the Tay, although with global warming, its range may spread further up the country. It likes a muddy shoreline inundated by high

tides but can dry out between them. Where it finds its right niche, it is usually prolific.

Uses

No longer used in glass making, this is an excellent green vegetable if you have a taste for its iodine tang. The younger they are, the more tender the whole plant, but larger specimens still have succulent flesh which, once cooked, you can pull off the woody stems using your teeth. However, it is not sufficiently common in Scotland to warrant real harvesting.

Harvesting

Gather samphire in June or July, taking one or two young plants of about 100–200cm in height, either by pulling them gently or by snipping them near the base with scissors. Either way destroys the specimen, so exercise due restraint unless you are on holiday near some English salt marsh, where you can really enjoy a meal of samphire.

Recipes

SAMPHIRE GREENS

Wash the samphire well then boil in unsalted water for a very short time. This may be less than a minute if you like it crisp, or up to three or four minutes if you prefer a softer texture. Keep testing until it seems right for your palate but beware, the juicy shoots retain heat for a long time!

You can serve it like asparagus, with melted butter or olive oil, or make it a side dish for shellfish or white fish where its brilliant green looks spectacular. You can pay a great deal for

this wild plant in London restaurants, so savour it well.

WARM SALAD OF SAMPHIRE

Pick through and wash a handful of samphire per person, then blanch it for a minute in boiling water. Dress with olive oil, lemon
juice and garlic. Add asparagus, or, if you are happy to mix the wild and the tame, add strips of red pepper for a very colourful effect.

SILVERWEED

Potentilla anserina

The Gaelic name of this plant, *an seachdamh aran*, means ‘the seventh bread’, showing how important it was as a famine food in coastal and island communities before the coming of the potato between 1730 and 1780. According to Alexander Carmichael a place on North Uist was so highly regarded for the growing of silverweed, that it was said a man could sustain himself on a square of ground of his own length.

All this is very surprising to anyone digging up silverweed roots for the first time as they seem so insignificant. The flower is yellow, buttercup-like but less shiny, and the leaves, pinnate, hairy and distinctly silvery-grey, particularly on their undersides.

Habitat

Silverweed is widespread throughout Scotland, except in the Highlands. It grows in a wide range of soils, from sand dunes

to compacted clay pastures, and is frequently found on roadside verges and growing on wasteland – but beware contamination in such habitats.

Uses

Both the leaves and root are edible. Raw roots taste dry and nutty and you are aware of the high starch content that makes the plant nutritious. Cooked ones are more mellow: palatable but not strongly flavoured. They can be dried and ground into flour to be used in soups or made into porridge. Young shoots and leaves can be eaten raw, either as a straight addition to salad, or made into a salsa, as in the recipe below. Beware older leaves as they are full of tough fibres.

A tea can be made from the leaves but it doesn't taste of much. However, a stronger version can be used to bathe sore skin, such as nappy rash in babies, or as an antiseptic mouthwash.

A pale yellow dye can be obtained from the plant, using alum as a mordant.

Harvesting

Silverweed, as dug from a roadside, has very thin roots and it is a struggle to prise them out of compacted earth. It is difficult to see how people gathered enough to make porridge or to grind into meal for bannocks. A suggestion by the Islay botanist, Richard Gulliver, is that it was collected during ploughing. It would certainly make it easy to gather a full basket if people simply picked the roots from the inverted mould as the ploughshare threw it aside.

Several accounts tell of the plant being cultivated as a

vegetable. If you select the fattest rooted specimens from the wild and plant them in a well-dug soil, then you may have a crop worth harvesting in the following season. This gets round the constant need to ask landowner permission in order to dig up roots. Make sure you pick a site away from your best beds, however, as silverweed spreads by sending out runners, just like its relative the strawberry, and quickly colonises a large area.

Recipes

FRIED SILVERWEED ROOTS

Select the fattest roots and scrub them until they are white. Chop into sections of about an inch long, then sauté in butter for a
couple of minutes. Add a generous splash of water and continue to cook until this has boiled off. Season with a little salt and pepper and eat as a garnish to a plain dish.

SILVERWEED SALSA

Take a bunch of young leaves and shoots, a handful of hazelnuts, two tablespoons of olive oil, one tablespoon of cider vinegar, one teaspoon of honey, salt and pepper, and blend in a food processor. Adjust seasoning, adding a little lemon juice if necessary. Use either as a salad, or, thinned with a little more oil, as a salad dressing.

SORREL

Rumex acetosa and other species of Rumex

The broad, slightly fleshy leaves of sorrel are easy to recognise. It is like a smaller, brighter green dock with glossy leaves and can easily be identified by its spike of red, bract-like florets. By the time it flowers, however, the leaves are past their best, so the flowers really only give you a marker to show you where to look next year. This is less true on rough lawns, where the cut plants regenerate throughout the mowing season. If you are patient, it should be possible to harvest a handful at any time during the summer. The leaves are sour and tangy, more strongly flavoured than cultivated sorrel.

Habitat

Sorrel is common in grassland throughout most of Scotland, from open woodland to coastal land. It thrives in pasture and is common enough on domestic lawns, although the leaf size tends to be reduced.

Uses

Sorrel is a delicious flavouring for soups and salads. Although highly regarded in France, there does not seem to be a long history of its having been eaten in Scotland. Young leaves can simply be added to the salad bowl. If wanted for flavouring soup or sauces, they should be chopped and added late in cooking, as they brown and lose their savour if boiled for more than a second.

Sorrel has also been employed as a mordant in the dyeing process.

Harvesting

Sorrel can be gathered in quantity without putting the species at any risk. Beware eating too much at one sitting, however, as although sorrel is a good source of vitamin C, it also has a high level of oxalic acid: it wouldn't do to eat it at the same meal as rhubarb or spinach! Leaves collected on grazing land are best used in soups and in cooked sauces to avoid any possibility of liver fluke. Garden grassland, or wasteland that is not overrun with dogs, can provide the salad leaves. Always wash them before use.

Recipes

SORREL SOUP

450g/1lb potatoes (chopped)

1 large onion (chopped)

1 litre/1.75 pints water

5g/1 level teaspoon salt

50g/2oz sorrel leaves, washed and finely chopped (approximately 2 handfuls)

Parsley

Salt and pepper

A little cream, if available

Boil the potatoes and onion in the salted water until soft. Liquidise, or simply mash well. Remove from the heat, add the finely chopped sorrel, parsley and pepper to taste. Either liquidise again, or simply eat as it is, with shreds of sorrel running through the soup. Add cream as a garnish. This soup can be made in fifteen minutes on a campfire, providing you chop everything small enough.

A SORREL SAUCE FOR FISH

25g/1oz butter

2 shallots or a medium sized onion (finely chopped)

75ml/0.5 glass dry white wine

275ml/10 fl oz crème fraiche

25g/1oz sorrel, washed and finely chopped (approximately 1 handful)

Sauté the shallots or onion in the butter until soft but not brown. Add the white wine and cook until it reduces slightly. Add the crème fraiche and bring gently back to a simmer. Remove from the heat and add the chopped sorrel, reserving a little for garnishing the fish. This sauce is very good with salmon in particular.

SWEET CICELY

Myrrhis odorata

This umbellifer plant, attractive to bees and other insects, can grow up to two metres in height with bright green, fine, feathery leaves. When brushed against or picked, they give off a sweet, aniseed scent, which is the signature of the plant. It has white umbels of flowers from early May till late June, which develop into slender seed heads of olive brown. The strongly aniseed-scented seeds, ridged, thin and about 20cm in length, are ripe from late July to August.

Habitat

Sweet cicely grows well in partial shade and prefers moist soils. It will grow through grass and in hedgerows, but can also be found in woodland and on hillsides. It was frequently planted near houses in Scotland, and it's very hardy (it can survive temperatures below –15˚C), so it is almost indestructible once established. Sweet cicely is easy to

propagate from seed, or sections of roots with a growing eye can be spilt and transplanted.

Uses

The leaves, roots and seeds are all edible. A few young leaves make a good addition to summer salads, or can be added to summer drinks. For their use as a tea, see p138 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.
Their other uses are as a flavouring for fish, and to sweeten sharp fruits such as rhubarb, blackcurrants and redcurrants. They can be added to jellies to give a hint of aniseed. The roots of young plants make an interesting substitute for parsnips. The seeds are good to nibble when green or can be used as seasoning when dry. They are significantly sweet and can be employed as an alternative to the leaves for most of the uses suggested above. Another use for the seeds is with fish pickles or as an interesting addition to stir-fries.

The leaves are full of the essential oil anethole. Dried, both the leaves and seeds can be used in pot pourri, or included in a mixed herb bouquet garni. They are also reputed to be good for cleansing wooden surfaces. Sweet cicely is an excellent plant for wildlife: bees, beetles, and flies are attracted to it, so it is good for biodiversity.

The root, seeds and leaves can have a settling effect on the stomach. They can also ease the symptoms of colds, act as an expectorant, can clear the head, ease coughs, and have an antiseptic effect on the mouth and throat.

Harvesting

Cut fresh young leaves to ground level and they will produce excellent regrowth. Leaves lose their flavour when plants are

in flower or going to seed. Fully ripe seed heads, gathered in August and dried, will store well. Roots are better taken from younger plants as older ones are likely to be woody.

Les Bates

Recipes

SWEET CICELY AND RHUBARB PUDDING

3 or 4 sticks rhubarb (chopped)

85g/3oz raisins

25g/1oz sweet cicely leaves, chopped (approximately a good handful)

140g/4.5oz plain flour

275ml/0.5 pint milk

4 eggs

25g/1oz butter

25g/1oz brown sugar

25ml/1 tablespoon sunflower or good rapeseed oil

A pinch of salt

This is essentially a sweet Yorkshire pudding. Blanch the rhubarb for a few minutes in boiling water, then drain it and add the sweet cicely and the raisins. Melt the brown sugar with the oil and butter in the bottom of a medium-sized, deep oven tray, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Put this in an oven pre-heated to 200˚C/400˚F/Reg 6 for a minute or two until the mixture bubbles. Don't let it burn.

Meanwhile, make the batter by putting the flour in a basin, making a well in the middle of it, and stirring in the eggs, followed by the milk. Add a pinch of salt and beat until smooth. Pour the batter into the hot tin, then scatter the rhubarb on top, avoiding the edges of the tin, so that the pudding can develop a crust. Bake for twenty minutes or more, until risen and brown, and serve in slices with plenty of the sweet syrup from below the pudding.

WILD GARLIC OR RAMSONS

Allium ursinum

This annual herb with broad, strongly garlic-smelling leaves and attractive heads of white star-shaped flowers is one of the most important wild harvests of the spring. It suddenly carpets woodland just at the moment when the hungry gap starts to yawn and the garden can yield little in the way of fresh greens. The earlier-flowering, thinner-leaved onion, few-flowered leek (*Allium paradoxum*), is even more common. It is edible, though a little bitter when raw, so best cooked.

You frequently smell wild garlic before you see it, in damp dells of the wilder parks in Edinburgh, in tiny parcels of woodland on the outskirts of towns, sometimes even noticing it from a car as you pass by. It is worth stopping to pick some leaves. CAUTION: Do not confuse with poisonous lily of the

valley (which does not smell of garlic and has only two leaves springing from a shoot, whereas wild garlic has many).

Habitat

It grows in damp, broadleaved woodlands and is widespread and locally common, although some areas do seem to lack a wild garlic woodland. It seeds readily, so ripe seeds could be worth gathering
in summer and sowing in a damp, out-of-the-way section of a large garden. It could become a nuisance in a smaller patch.

Uses

The leaves are excellent chopped into salads, as a flavouring in stews and sauces, and to make dressings. Larger quantities can be made into soup or pesto, or simply stir-fried and eaten as a vegetable. A tea made with wild garlic leaves (or freshly pressed juice) is good for intestinal disorders including dyspepsia and diarrhoea.

Harvesting

Wild garlic comes up in the spring, from April to June, and can be very abundant. Leaves and flowers can both be used but harvest sustainably by taking no more than one or two from any plant. Do not threaten the species by digging up the roots as they are, in any case, stringy and not worthwhile.

Recipes

WILD GARLIC PASTE OR PESTO

85g/3oz wild garlic leaves (approximately 2 large handfuls)

50g/2oz hazelnuts

50ml/2 tablespoons olive oil

25ml/1 tablespoon lemon juice

A little sugar, salt and pepper to taste

Nutmeg to taste

Either chop the leaves and nuts by hand until you have a paste, or put them in a food processor with the oil, lemon juice and seasonings and process until reasonably smooth. Add a little more olive oil if you want a sauce for pasta, and less if you want a paste you can spread on toast or oatcakes.

WEEDS-IN-THE-HOLE

Margaret Lear

A few leaves of ground elder, bistort and comfrey (if you are happy to use it, see the warning on p43).

2 leeks or stems and leaves of ramsons or three-cornered leeks

50g/2oz self-raising flour (or plain flour and 5g/0.2oz baking powder)

1 egg

275ml/0.5 pint milk

Salt and pepper

Pre-heat the oven to 200˚C/400˚F/Reg 6. Wash and finely chop the elder, bistort and comfrey leaves (if using). Wash and chop the leeks or stems and leaves. Gently fry the

chopped leeks until softened, add the chopped leaves and stir-fry for three or four minutes. Meanwhile, put a little oil into an ovenproof dish or tin into the pre-heated oven for about five minutes until hot. Make a Yorkshire pudding batter by beating the flour into the beaten egg and milk. Transfer the leaves and leek to the dish and pour the batter over it. Return to the oven and cook for fifteen to twenty minutes until golden on top. This dish is nice served with gravy and a jacket potato.

OTHER USEFUL SALADS, LEAVES AND GREENS

HAWTHORN
Crataegus monogyna

The leaves, when young and fresh, have a pleasantly nutty flavour. Sometimes known as 'bread-and-cheese', these are more commonly picked more for fun than as serious food but can add an interesting flavour to salads. For more about hawthorn, see p96 in Fruits and Nuts.

PIGNUT
Conopodium majus

It is probably a cheat to put pignut in a book that claims to be about really useful species. It's true that it tastes delicious but is so difficult to harvest that it takes the dedication of an eleven-year-old with a penknife and all the time in the world

to gain more than one or two of them.

That boy or girl will find the tall, thin stem with its delicate, white, slightly feathery umbel and short, carroty leaves growing in permanent pasture, often on sunny banks with light soils. The
hazelnut-sized nodule is usually attached to the root at 15–20cm below the surface, so following that stem down into the earth takes ages. People say that you can just put a garden fork to the job but, if you break the fragile stem, which becomes an even more fragile root, it is almost impossible to find the pignut.

If you want to take up the challenge, remember to get landowner permission first as you are digging up the plant. It is certainly worth sampling this crunchy, parsnip-flavoured nut, but winning enough to make a meal would take too long and be too destructive. Pignut is a plant that protects itself well.

SALAD BURNET

Poterium sanguisorba or Sanguisorba minor

Although not common in Scotland because it prefers limestone to our generally more acidic soils, salad burnet is found near the east coast from Fife to Berwickshire and in some counties in the south-west. The pretty, mid-green, pinnate leaves with serrated edges are very palatable. They have a taste like delicate cucumber. Gather no more than a third of the leaves from any one plant, and only harvest where there is a good colony. Consider gathering seeds and growing your own as it a pleasant addition to any salad bowl.

AROMATIC SEASONINGS

JUNIPER
Juniperus communis

Although juniper is no longer common in Scotland, it hangs on in many places and is being re-instated in several ecological restoration sites. The small coniferous shrub, usually gnarled, has two distinct forms, the prostrate and the erect, both of which have short bristly needles. From a distance the shrub may look like gorse. After summer flowering, it sets small green cones, which can take up to a year to mature and ripen, so flowers and both green cones and dark blue 'berries' often appear on the plant at the same time. Birds love them, so keep an eye on ripening cones and gather a modest quantity when you see them turn blue.

Use in marinades, casseroles and soups, especially with game. Ground up juniper berries offer a tangy, resinous alternative

to pepper, which can give an interesting taste to anything from mashed potatoes to grilled tomatoes.

SPRUCE
Picea sitchensis and other species of Picea

Spruce is not native to Scotland but Norway spruce, from continental Europe, and sitka spruce, from the Pacific Northwest of America, are very widely planted and are becoming naturalised. Both species of spruce are used in preparing food and drink in North America, Scandinavia and the Baltic region, as well as having many other non-timber uses, including making beautiful, watertight baskets from the fine roots. The principle culinary purpose of spruce shoots is to provide a tangy, resin flavour but they are also a rich source of vitamin C. Captain Cook took spruce beer on sea voyages to prevent scurvy, and one enterprising New Zealand company is making a Captain Cook ale, flavoured with spruce shoots. Spruce beers have also been made on a commercial basis in Scotland, sometimes as a Christmas special. Spruce syrup is regarded as an essential remedy for colds and coughs in Latvia; and more sugar and more boiling results in a clear jelly-like preserve, which can be purchased on market stalls in Sweden.

Rene Redzepi, whose Noma restaurant in Copenhagen has been voted the world's number one, uses spruce needles in a variety of ways: he makes syrups, vinegars and oils, creates freeze-dried spruce 'sprinkles' and has a signature dish – white asparagus grilled between spruce branches. Young spruce shoot tips can also be eaten raw, straight from the tree as a tasty snack. Gather them soon after they burst from their

brown papery sheaths; see p138 in Wines, Teas and Cordials for a recipe for spruce tea, p142 for spruce beer and p153 for spruce syrup.

Ian Edwards

WATER MINT
Mentha aquatica

The red shoots of water mint, which appear from late March along many water courses and beside marshes throughout much of Scotland, make a pungent tea. As the plant matures, the leaves turn dark green and clusters of lilac-coloured flowers form at the top of the stems. Although both the leaves and flowers make a good minty seasoning for salads or sauces, there is an obvious hazard from potential liver fluke. Do not use raw, unless you are collecting from a place where you are sure there are neither livestock nor pond snails, the two creatures that host liver fluke at different stages of its life cycle. For a water mint tea recipe, see p137 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.

WILD MARJORAM
Origanum vulgare

This is another plant that prefers calcareous soils but it still crops up on wasteland, coastal dunes, railway embankments and as a volunteer in gardens in most of the Lowlands. It is easy to recognise its wiry stems with twinned clusters of neat leaves, topped by a mauve flower. The savoury leaves are very useful for seasoning all sorts of dishes, and can also be used, finely chopped, in salads.

WILD THYME

Thymus polytrichus, subspecies britannicus

This low-growing wild plant with tiny leaves, familiar from folk songs, grows on Scottish heaths and moors. Although widespread, it is less aromatic than its cultivated relation. If you see its low pink cluster of bell-like flowers on a hot day, it may be worth taking some sprigs home, for they seem at their best when warmed by the sun. Use as you would garden thyme, but in greater quantity.

YARROW

Achillea millefolium

Yarrow is a dark green perennial plant that grows up to 60–80cm high. It has feathery leaves and a slightly woolly appearance, with white flower heads arranged in flat-top clusters from May to August. Occasionally they are cream or pink. When you rub the leaves between your fingers you will

smell a strong, medicinal, ‘rosemary’ aroma. In the Hebrides yarrow was used in charms to foretell the future. Yarrow grows throughout Scotland, except in very boggy sites, and is particularly fond of roadsides and grassy banks.

Yarrow can be used instead of rosemary to flavour meat dishes and is particularly suitable finely chopped with pheasant, hare, rabbit, squirrel or seafood as it can be a bit overpowering with milder game. John Evelyn (1620–1706), an English diarist, recommended the young leaves ‘lightly fried until turning brown, then eaten with orange juice and sugar’. In Scandinavia yarrow is called ‘field hops’ and used instead of hops to flavour beer or ‘gruit ale’. It figures in some more local recipes for nettle beer and metheglin.

For the medicinal uses of yarrow, see p180 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild, and for yarrow tea p139 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.

Monica Wilde

CHAPTER FOUR

FRUITS AND NUTS

Considering how far north we are, Scotland enjoys a good range of wild fruits, from the well-known blaeberries and brambles to species such as the cherry plum and sea buckthorn, which are overlooked by most people, and often treated with surprise and mistrust when found. You are not likely to go wrong with crab apples, sloes and damsons, but if you are not familiar with hedgerow plants like barberry or the seaside shrub, sea buckthorn, do operate with a good identification guide. They are all easy to learn. Scrupulous identification of habitat should keep you right with moorland berries. Small black berries that resemble blaeberries but are found growing on a field edge are almost certainly not blaeberries and may well be poisonous.

BLACKTHORN OR SLOE

Prunus spinosa

This thorny native hedgerow shrub is early flowering, sometimes with single flowers or else with strings of paired white flowers along its stems. Its black fruits – sloes – are bitter to taste but are useful when used with gin, or whisky and other spirits, to which they impart colour and flavour. The fruits are often best collected from October onwards, after frosts.

Sloes can be used to make wine, and teas, although their dry, astringent flavour is more purgative and cleansing (they have good antiseptic properties) than strictly pleasurable. Only in the hottest summers do these little plums become anything like palatable when fresh. However, they are useful, along with juniper berries, in a pickle for preparing salmon for the smokehouse.

The shrub can grow to four or five metres high and old stems provide strong wood, traditionally used in Scotland to produce the short, truncheon-like ‘priests’ for despatching salmon and trout when caught on a rod and line. The wood has also been used for wooden instruments, rasps, knocking

sticks and drum sticks. The bark can provide material for a yellow dye. It is often thought that the thorns of the blackthorn, more than other hedgerow species, can cause poisonous inflammations. This is probably due to their great length
and iron-hardness, as they can deliver a nasty puncture wound. This seeming defect is a benefit to farmers as, with hawthorn, they do help to provide good stock barriers.

Les Bates

BLAEBERRY

Vaccinium myrtillus

This low-growing shrub is familiar to any hill walker. Its dark purple berries are one of the most commonly gathered wild fruits in Scotland today. In good years the crop can be prolific, with plant stems beaded with multitudes of berries. These can provide instant snacks as you go up steep slopes, where you do not even have to bend to collect them, but they are wonderful to pick in larger quantities to take home.

Blaeberry is increasingly regarded as a very important species, nutritionally rich and with many therapeutic benefits. In Scandinavia and parts of Eastern Europe the fruits and leaves are commercially harvested without detriment to the plants or to the environment. The potential to do this in Scotland has yet to be realised, although it has been suggested that this native plant could yield a better return per hectare than is gained from sheep farming.

Habitat

Blaeberry is common in Scots pine woodland where the ground flora is intact, and on moorland from the Borders to the Highlands.

Uses

The fruits are delicious on their own but go well with yoghurt or ice cream. They can be made into a variety of puddings and pies, sometimes teamed with apple. Blaeberry muffins beat the American blueberry muffin for flavour, and our wild

fruit is far more nutritious than the cultivated imported ones.

Blaeberry is currently of interest because it has been shown to contain powerful antioxidants. It is also recognised as a stimulant to peripheral blood supply, particularly to the eyes; as useful in the treatment of diabetes and rheumatological disorders; and as a means of stilling mild diarrhoea and indigestion. All this suggests that the folk remedies of the past had foundation in fact.

Harvesting

The berries are ripe between July and September, depending on the quality of the season and the height and aspect of where the plants are growing. You can pick by hand but a Scandinavian-style berry scoop speeds up the operation. See www.forestharvest.org.uk/berryscoops.htm for more information.

Recipes

BLAEBERRY MUFFINS

110g/4oz butter

110g/4oz self-raising flour

65g/2.5oz sugar

2 eggs

100g/3.5oz blaeberries (or more if you want them really fruity!)

Cream the butter and sugar. Add the flour and gently mix in. Add the eggs a little at a time and mix gently. Finally add the

blaeberries. Divide into individual paper cases on a muffin tray or plain baking tray. Cook at 180˚C/350˚F/Reg 4 for about thirty minutes, checking after twenty minutes to make sure they are not scorching.

BRAMBLE OR BLACKBERRY

Rubus fruticosus

This thorny scrambler with white flowers and composite black berries is probably the most easily identified of wild fruit. It is certainly one of the most frequently gathered. The 2006 Forest Research paper 'Wild Harvests from Scottish Woodlands' discovered that almost a quarter of the people of Scotland had picked brambles in the previous five years.

Brambling on warm autumn days is one of the keenest pleasures on offer from the wild. If you can find a good patch (and there are so many species of bramble that the quality of fruit is very variable), it is easy for almost anyone from age three to ninety-three to collect a worthwhile quantity.

The plant seeds itself freely and also grows vigorously by suckering, making it more of a weed than a welcome guest in gardens. Besides, those that appear unbidden in gardens too often bear mean, sour, little berries. If you have a wild patch where you do want to introduce bramble, make sure your

stock is from a plant that produces, large, sweet, even fruit.

Habitat

Open woodlands and glades, hedges, woodland edges, old railway tracks and wasteland throughout most of Scotland.

Uses

The berries are delicious on their own but bramble and apple is a traditional pairing that excites the sense of smell as well as the taste buds. It embodies sunshine, with a sharp, nostalgic tang of autumn.

Brambles freeze well and can also be made into wine, jelly, jam (although this is very seedy unless plenty of apples are included), crumble, summer pudding, and the best of all autumn puddings, bramble and apple pie.

A tea from the leaves (two cupfuls of pounded leaves in 1 litre/1¾ pints of boiling water) is recommended for mild anaemia and debility. Drink two cups per day sweetened with honey. A stronger decoction of the leaves can be used as a mouthwash and is useful against oral thrush.

The young shoots (steamed and eaten as a vegetable) are also said to be excellent for digestive ailments and skin problems. Older shoots are sometimes used in basketry and large, thick basal stems and roots for carving tobacco pipes.

Brambles provide a variety of shades of dye from rose pink to mauve-brown.

Harvesting

Gather brambles in the late summer and early autumn.

Tradition has it that the Devil spits on them after Old Michaelmas Day, 10th October, but the truth is that after frosts they become watery and unpalatable. If you are picking from roadside hedges, avoid busy roads because of pollution from vehicles and take care of traffic on minor ones. Take care, too, if you are gathering on brownfield sites, as the ground may be polluted from earlier use.

Recipes

BRAMBLE AND APPLE PIE

For a 23cm/9" shallow metal pie dish:

340g/12oz plain flour

170g/6oz margarine or butter

5-6 tablespoons iced water

Pinch of salt

250–375g/9–13oz brambles

4 large cooking apples or many more small ones.

200g/7oz sugar

25ml/1 fl oz milk

Rub the butter into the flour using cool hands, or whizz in a food processor until it resembles breadcrumbs. Add the water and mix in well to make a soft but not sticky dough. Rest the pastry by refrigerating for a minimum of twenty minutes. Once rested divide the pastry into slightly unequal halves and roll the larger out to cover the base of the pie dish with comfort.

Peel, core and slice the apples. Add a layer of apple to the dish, then some brambles and a scattering of sugar. Repeat until the dish is piled almost as high above its rim as it is deep. Roll out the remaining pastry to make a lid. Dampen down the bottom pastry edge with milk. Use the rolling pin to lift the lid into position and seal round the edges by pinching. Add a pastry decoration if you have any trimmings and paint the whole top surface with milk before putting the pie into a preheated oven at 220˚C/425˚F/Reg 7. Cook until starting to brown (about ten to twenty minutes) then reduce heat to 170˚C/340˚F/Reg 4 and cook a further half-hour or so, until a knife slides into the pie with ease. Cool slightly before serving.

BRAMBLE JELLY

1.8kg/4lb brambles

900g/2lb sour cooking apples, windfalls or crab apples

1.1 litres/2 pints water

Sugar at the rate of 450g per 570ml of strained juice (1lb to 1 pint)

Wash and roughly chop apples if they are large; small ones go in whole. Put the fruit and water into a large pan and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook until the apples are pulp. Strain through a cloth hammock, which you can make by inverting a stool on a table and fixing the cloth to each of the four legs with a stout rubber band. Put a large collection vessel under the hammock. If you want a clear jelly, it is wise to allow the
liquid to drain though without any squeezing. Mix 570ml/1 pint to 450g/1lb of sugar. Heat gently until it is dissolved,

then bring to a full rolling boil until the setting point is achieved.

CHERRY PLUM

Prunus cerasifera

Naturalised rather than native, ‘feral’ is one nice way to categorise the cherry plum. It grows freely from seed, forming a slight tree some ten metres high. In the winter it bears a mass of dark twigs; in the summer these carry a hanging wall of dark green leaves, almost hiding the fruit which, in a good year, hangs in curtains between July and September. The fruits (around 3–5cm) can be as small as cherries, but bear an indented line down one side, in contrast to the uninterrupted roundness of a cherry.

It is planted for its flowers, which appear as early as February, but it crops abundantly at least as far north as Aberdeen. The blossom, pure white and lovely against the winter dark, withstands the frost and, in warm weather, makes excellent early bee forage. It also makes the tree very easy to spot for future foraging. Look for glossy greens and reds on the growing tips of the twigs, and an absence of any real thorns – if your find is dark and spiny, it may instead be blackthorn.

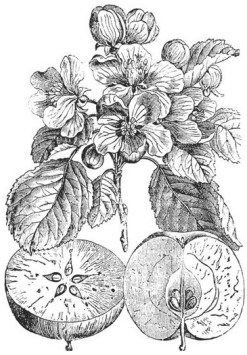
Cherry plums shade between reds and yellows and, very usefully, different trees in the same row will ripen at different times. This provides a long potential harvesting period for the busy urban forager, and means, in shared and public spaces, that there is no danger of anyone snaffling the lot in a single weekend. Many are mild and sweet if eaten raw – not the richest of plums, but very pleasant – becoming more sharp if dried or cooked. Cooking also develops the flavour: they

make superb jam. Stored in the freezer – simply washed, destoned and halved
– then stewed gently, they make a fine ingredient to cheer the fruitless months of winter.

To remove the stones, place each plum on a chopping board, and press a sharp-ish knife down on to it, with the blade parallel to the length of the stone. With practise, you can halve the fruit and dislodge the stone simultaneously – and go on to the next one, and the next! An easy technique is vital, as in a good year cherry plums can be collected by the bucketful.

Used extensively in modern mixed farm hedge planting, it will alas scarcely fruit if trimmed. This hardy, fabulous little species is just one good argument for allowing a few trees to rise up from every hedgerow.

Emma Chapman



CRAB APPLE

Malus sylvestris

This fruit is also known as wild apple, wild crab, *aball* (Irish) gribble, grindstone apple, bittersgall, wilding tree, and in the Borders as scrogs.

The crab apple is a deciduous, broadleaf, dome-shaped, slow-growing tree that reaches about ten to fifteen metres high. It is difficult to spot in a mixed woodland as the blossoms are often
above the tree canopy. However, in winter the bright yellow-green ‘crabs’ become obvious on the tree and littering the woodland floor. The green, notably glossy, oval leaves grow up to 6cm and alternate on the shoot. They have rounded triangular teeth and the underside has few hairs or no hairs. The leaves are often folded or appear crumpled. The stalk is 2–3cm long and spur shoots may bear a thorn. The bark is smooth and green-brown with large, orange breathing pores (lenticels), and older trees have scaly ridges. The

blossom consists of white or pink flowers in clusters of four to seven appearing with the leaves in the spring.

The globe-shaped fruit, 2–3cm by 2–4cm, are yellow-green, often flushed with red and carry the remnants of the flower. They have a sharp, dry and sour taste when raw but make excellent jelly and can be roasted with game or roast meats.

Habitat

The crab apple is common in ancient woodlands and hedgerows all over Britain and northern Europe. They usually grow singly but in old woods they can be found in clumps due to suckering and self-seeding. Wild crab apples are rarely planted but ornamental varieties are often seen in parks and gardens; the fruits of all varieties may be used to make jelly and jams.

Uses

Crab apple is the only indigenous apple in Britain and its rootstock has been used to produce many of our 2,000 domestic apple varieties. The crab apple has been cultivated since early times, and crab apples have been found in early Bronze Age burial tombs. Celtic stories identify the apple with love and fertility and the star found when an apple is cut across its middle is known as Aphrodite's Star, Aphrodite being the goddess of love. According to folklore if lovers throw crab apple pips into the fire and they explode, then love is true.

The Celts and Vikings would have made the fruit more palatable by fermenting, drying it to intensify the natural sugars, or cooking it with honey.

The timber of the crab apple is uniform and dense in texture and if dried slowly, is excellent for woodworking. At one time it
was used for making set squares and other drawing instruments. The bark produces a yellow dye for wool or cloth.

Bees frequent the blossoms freely and crab apples are often planted in orchards to help cross-pollinate orchard fruit. Crab apples increase the biodiversity of hedgerows and woodlands.

Harvesting

Fruits can be gathered from September to October but they can withstand the fiercest of gales, so may stay on the tree until the following spring.

Jools Cox

Recipes

For crab apple tea, see p136 in the Wines, Teas and Cordials chapter.

CRAB APPLE JELLY

Crab apples have a stronger apple flavour than most cultivated apples and high pectin levels so the jelly is particularly good. Crab apples can be cooked with other fruits that do not have such good setting qualities to improve the flavour and setting potential.

To make the jelly, you will need crab apples, water, lemon juice, sugar and herbs or spices to taste. Rosemary, thyme, lavender, mint, sloes, elderberry, elderflowers, blackberries, ginger, cinnamon or cloves can all be added to this basic crab

apple jelly, preferably contained in a muslin bag to avoid bits. Sprigs of herbs and flowers put in the jar at potting stage can look very attractive.

Halve the crab apples, put in a pan with 1.25 litres/2 generous pints of water for every 1kg/2.2lb of fruit. Simmer till tender and strain through a jelly bag. Measure the resulting juice and pour into a pan with your chosen herbs or spices, along with sugar. The rule of thumb is 570ml/1 pint to 450g/1lb. Add the juice of a lemon for each litre of crab apple juice. Stir over gentle heat until the sugar is dissolved, boil gently to set, pour into sterilised jars and cover immediately, tightening the lids as the jars cool (with care and using a cloth as they will still be very hot).

CRAB APPLE BUTTER

910g/2lb crab apples

275ml/0.5 pint water

Sugar

Quarter the crab apples, put in a pan with water and cook till really soft. Push through a sieve, return to pan and add 500g/ 1.1lb sugar for 1kg/2.2lb of pulp, stirring constantly. Cook until thick.

SPICED CRAB APPLES *(to be served with roast meats)*

Take 2kg/4.4lb of crab apples and remove the blossom end, then wash and dry. Make a syrup with 1 litre/2 pints of cider vinegar and 1kg/2.2lb of sugar. When the sugar is dissolved add a muslin spice bag containing cinnamon, cloves, garlic, chilli flakes and ginger. Cook the apples in batches, making

sure they are covered by the syrup, and turn them frequently. Cook gently until they are tender but don't let them burst. Carefully take the crab apples out using a slotted spoon and put into sterilised jars. Cover apples with the spiced syrup, seal and store in a cool dark cupboard. Serve with game, cold meats, cheese and salads.

A WASSAIL CUP FOR YULETIDE

Wash the crab apples and make a score around their middles. Place on a flat tray and cook in the oven for about twenty minutes. Make the wassail drink in a large pan: put in 2 litres/ 3½ pints of brown ale or cider, add three tablespoons of honey, some ground cinnamon, half a teaspoon of ginger and half a teaspoon of cloves. Heat till almost boiling then take off the heat and add the roasted apples. Let the flavours infuse – a little brandy or whisky can be added for a bit more kick! Traditionally pieces of toast were also floated on the top to ensure a good harvest and prosperity.

DOG ROSE

Rosa canina

Dog rose (or briar) is a sprawling, scrambling shrub notable for the beauty and scent of its white or pink flowers, the redness of its berries (hips) and the sharpness of its prickles! There are other species of wild rose with which it might be confused, but for culinary purposes it doesn't really matter which is which.

Habitat

Dog rose is most commonly found in hedgerows, woodland edges and scrub vegetation.

Uses

The most famous use of dog rose is for making rose hip syrup. Rose hips are extremely rich in vitamin C, and when citrus fruits were unavailable during the Second World War, a collection scheme was set up by the Ministry of Health to

produce rose hip syrup for expectant mothers and children. Scottish fruit proved to be particularly vitamin-rich, and by the end of the war hundreds of tonnes were gathered every year by school children, volunteers and community groups.

Rose hip syrup is more than just a health booster, though. It makes a delicious topping for ice creams and puddings or can be mixed with yoghurt. Rose hips also make good wine and can be included in autumn jellies, though they need thorough chopping or mincing (easiest with a food processor) to extract their
flavour and goodness. They can also be chopped, fresh or dried, and infused in boiling water to make rose hip tea (it's worth getting rid of the seeds and surrounding hairs before chopping or drying them). This not only tastes pleasant but has medicinal uses, including boosting the immune system and reducing fever (see p138 for further comments on rose hip tea).

Supposedly the symbolic role of the 'white rose of Scotland' originated with a flower Bonnie Prince Charlie plucked from the wayside and put in his bonnet on his way to disaster. Dog rose stems were formerly used in Fife for making lobster creels, and children have long made use of the tiny hairs that surround the seeds as a devilish itching-powder. Boys in the Borders apparently used to strip the outside off young juicy dog rose stems and chew them – maybe they still do.

Harvesting

Hips are best picked with gloves, shortly after they have reddened before the frosts have turned them mushy. There's no particular trick to it – you just pick them!

William Milliken

Recipes

For rose hip syrup, see p151 in Wines, Teas and Cordials.

DOG ROSE PETAL JAM

Gather 250g/9oz of fresh dog rose petals on a sunny day (far away from agricultural spraying), rinse and drain, place in a mixing bowl with 200g/7oz of sugar and the juice of a large lemon or two smaller ones, and knead until mushy. Add another 400g/14oz of sugar and 600ml/1 (generous) pint of water in a saucepan and boil until it has thickened (about half an hour). Pour into hot sterilised jars and seal.

You can also make jelly from the petals, in much the same way as you make jelly from anything else (see, for example, hawthorn on p97).

ELDER

See p25 in the Key Species chapter

ELM

See wych elm on p107 of this chapter.

GEAN OR WILD CHERRY

Prunus avium

Wild cherry is called ‘gean’ in Scotland and the ‘merry tree’ in Shetland. It is native to Britain, where kernels have been found in archaeological sites dating back to the Bronze Age. It is deciduous and grows up to anything from five to twenty-five metres. The leaves are long, pointed with a saw-tooth edge and, notably, two red glands on either side of the leaf stalk. The papery bark tends to peel on older trees. The tree flowers in white-petalled clusters, with each flower on its own stalk, from which the fruits form.

Habitat

It grows throughout Scotland in woodland and hedges, although it is less common in the north. It prefers rich, free-draining, lowland soils.

Uses

For culinary use, the cherries are usually sweet enough when fully ripe to be picked and eaten raw, although fruit from some trees may stay quite tart. They can also be lightly stewed, made into syrups, cordials, jams, fruit leathers, cherry pies and any other dish where cultivated cherries would be used. Cherries can also be dried slowly in a cool oven and then added to muesli or fruit and nut mixes. In this case they should be pitted first, which may take you a while, but the flavour is far more intense that shop-bought cherries and worth the effort!

Wild cherry schnapps is also easily made by covering the cherries in vodka and leaving to soak for three months. For an almondy flavour you can also crack a few of the kernels and add them in as they contain almond flavoured cyanogenic glycosides (potentially toxic in very large amounts). Wild cherry brandy – where the cherries are sprinkled with sugar, covered with brandy and left for three months before straining – is also a country favourite.

Traditionally, in the Scottish Highlands, cherry stalks were also boiled in water (30g of stalks per litre) for twenty minutes, then added to some cherry juice, to make a pleasant diuretic drink to help support (calorie-restricted!) weight-loss diets. The flowers can also be used in tinctures and syrups and impart a lovely cherry flavour.

Nutritionally, as well as high levels of vitamin C, wild cherries contain vitamins A, B1, B2, niacin, calcium, phosphorus, iron and potassium, but they are low in calories. Wild cherries are also very high in antioxidants, which can help to protect against the effects of ageing, such as cancer and heart disease. Wild fruits are generally much higher in nutrients than orchard fruits.

Harvesting

The fruits can ripen at any time between June and August, depending on site and sunshine levels.

Monica Wilde

GEAN CLAFOUTI

Fuggo King

600g/1.25lb cherries

100g/4oz flour

3 eggs

100g/4oz sugar

200ml/4 fl oz milk

150ml/5 fl oz crème fraiche or yoghurt

50g/2oz butter

Arrange the cherries in a buttered dish. Mix flour, beaten eggs, sugar, milk, yoghurt and melted butter and pour the mixture on to the cherries. Bake at a medium heat in the middle of the oven for about one hour.

HAWTHORN

Crataegus monogyna

Normally a smallish, somewhat twisted tree with a characteristically fluted trunk, hawthorn is the dominant species in many hedgerows. It is long-lived and responds well to cutting, producing a dense, thorny barrier to livestock. Though hawthorn's
fresh green leaves may be among the earliest signs of rebirth after a lengthy winter, it's not usually until May that it flowers. But when it does flower, it does so in style: spectacular shows of creamy blossom that light up the countryside – the epitome of fecundity and spring. The musky bedroom smell of these virginal flowers, combined with the timing of their appearance, made it a natural choice for inclusion in symbolic springtime rites during ancient times.

Hawthorn berries, also known as 'haws', are rather variable in size, shape and shade, ranging from bright red to purple. Each bears a single seed surrounded by a yellowish, pulpy mass.

Haws provide one of the few splashes of colour in the winter landscape and constitute an important food source for birds at a time when others are in short supply. An abundance of haws is said to presage a harsh winter ('mony haws, mony snaws'), but given they're abundant virtually every year this might be akin to saying that kissing is in season when the furze is in bloom!

Habitat

As well as being abundant in hedgerows, hawthorn is found in woodlands, scrub and hill land. It tolerates shade and survives on most types of soil.

Uses

The nutty-sweet flavour and floury texture of fresh-picked, ripe haws are among life's under-appreciated and unexpected pleasures; the presence of their seeds in archaeological remains suggests they may have been on the Scottish menu for a long time.

Haws can be made into respectable jams, jellies, wines and syrups, either alone or in conjunction with other autumn fruits (crab apples certainly help to get the jelly to set). They can even be turned into chutney. The Danes make a sort of schnapps from them, though if truth be told they make schnapps out of pretty well anything. Cover the berries with vodka in a jar, sweeten with a little sugar if desired and leave in a dark place for a couple of months – *skål*! The leaves, when young and fresh, have a pleasantly nutty flavour, good for nibbling or for salads (see p73 in Salads, Leaves and Greens).

Hawthorn has several other uses. Its wood makes excellent

fuel, burning well even when green, and can be used for turning. Its nectar is a valuable source of honey, and venerable thorn trees were commonly attributed ritual, historical or superstitious associations. Hawthorn also has many medicinal uses, probably the most widespread being for treating cardiac and circulatory disorders (see p185 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild). Generally taken as a decoction of the dried berries (though the leaves and flowers may also be used), this is also said to help alleviate insomnia.

Though hawthorn's lovely blossom might seem to make it a natural choice for brightening the house, it has traditionally been eschewed for this purpose. Whether this relates to its associations with death, Catholicism or springtime fornication is uncertain.

Harvesting

Haws are best gathered after the first frosts, when they become softer and more flavoursome. In some parts of Scotland it used to be thought that they were only ready for picking after the witches had flown over them at Halloween. The thorny nature of the twigs demands leather gloves for serious harvesting, and it's worth seeking out varieties with long, unbranched berry-bearing twigs that can be stripped relatively efficiently into a bag with one firm pull.

Recipes

HAWTHORN AND CRAB APPLE JELLY

This is a generic recipe for jellies and the same could be done with most fruits. It's quite fun just to make an 'autumn jelly' with whatever comes out of the hedgerow on a given day. Try adding spices before boiling if you feel adventurous.

Fill a jelly pan with ripe hawthorns and chopped crab apples (about 60:40 by bulk). Add a couple of chopped lemons. Cover with water and boil, crushing the fruit thoroughly with a potato masher when soft. Strain through a jelly bag or muslin overnight. If you don't feel you've got enough of the goodness out of the mash you can put it back in the pan, add another 570ml/1 pint of boiling water from the kettle, stir up thoroughly and return to
the (washed) jelly bag. Measure the fluid and add 450g of sugar for each 570ml (1lb to 1 pint). Boil until it reaches setting point, removing the scum with a spoon, and seal in sterilised jars.

William Milliken

Hazel

See p29 in the Key Species chapter.

ROWAN

Sorbus aucuparia

The rowan, or mountain ash, is a beautiful tree of modest size, with pinnate leaves. It is the second letter in the Gaelic tree alphabet, and in Gaelic it is *caorann*, or *fuinnseag-coille*, which means 'wood enchantress'. Its Latin name, *Sorbus aucuparia*, means fruit for catching birds, and it is also called fowler's service tree because its berries were used as bait for birds by trappers (fowlers). Vikings believed that the first woman came from a rowan,
and it is the sacred symbol of Brigid, Celtic goddess of poetry, music and arts.

Rowans produce boudoir-scented blossom in May or June, a mass of tiny flowers with five white petals and five sepals. Its blood-red berries ripen in August or September.

Habitat

Rowan is a common species of woodlands, especially in the

north, but it is browsed preferentially by deer and sheep, so it's often found growing on crags and cliffs where teeth can't reach. Large flocks of fieldfares and redwings come to Scotland from Scandinavia in autumn to feast on its berries, and they help to disperse its seeds.

Uses

The most magical trees, rowans are traditionally planted by houses to bring good luck. Any discerning witch casts spells with a rowan wand and the twigs have many traditional roles in warding off evil, particularly from livestock. Fastening a rowan twig to the halyard of a boat will keep it safe from storms, and if fishing is poor, tying one to your line or net might help.

There is an ancient taboo against felling a rowan tree or cutting the wood for anything except ceremonial purposes, but it was used for special objects like spindles. The cross-beams of chimneys are called 'rantrees' because they were often made of rowan wood, to protect a house from bad spirits.

The berries are used for jellies. They also make a lovely rose wine, and those who drink the distilled spirit can see into the future, or perhaps just see double!

Harvesting

Rowans are prolific fruiters and there are usually plenty of berries hanging on low enough branches of the tree to make them easy to gather. Snip the berry clusters with secateurs rather than ripping them off by hand, and strip the berries off their stalks with a fork.

The berries are best when newly ripened, although if there are lots of birds around, a tree can be robbed before you know it. If you need to climb a tree to gather higher fruit, take care!

Recipes

ROWAN JELLY

Rowan berries are high in vitamin C. Eating them is said to add a year to your life, but they are too bitter to eat raw. Rowan berry jelly is traditionally eaten with venison and other game meat. Its tartness makes it an excellent substitute for marmalade and it goes well with cheese, and sweet vegetables like swede and carrots.

Take an equal weight of berries, off their stalks, and roughly chopped cooking apples. Just cover the fruit with water, bring it to the boil and simmer until the apple disintegrates and the berries are soft. Strain overnight in a muslin or jelly bag. Don't squeeze the bag! For each 570ml/1 pint of cloudy pink juice, add 450g/1lb of sugar and boil it until it reaches the setting point. It will clarify to a beautiful ruby colour.

Mandy Haggith

SEA BUCKTHORN

Hippophae rhamnoides

This is a vigorous, proud and ferociously spiny deciduous shrub, growing up to three metres, with attractive linear, silvery leaves and, on female plants, thick clusters of bright orange berries borne from late August right through the winter to March. Said to be a favourite food of the mythic flying horse Pegasus, the
name *Hippophae* comes from the Greek meaning ‘shining horse’.

Sea buckthorn is not considered native to Scotland, although it is in eastern England, and throughout Europe and central Asia. It was widely planted here during the 1980s to stabilise coastal sand dunes, due to its incredible ability to thrive on the poorest sandy soils under the harshest, saltiest of conditions. Spreading by suckers as well as seed, it has become widely naturalised, forming extensive dense thickets,

sometimes to the detriment of rare and fragile coastal grassland communities where drastic measures (ripping up with a JCB and burning) have rightly been taken to control or eradicate it. Often regarded with some suspicion in Scotland because of its foreignness, invasiveness, and lack of local folklore, sea buckthorn has become accepted in some areas for its striking beauty in the landscape and for its value as a food source for migrating fieldfares and redwings. Due to the look of its berries, it is sometimes humorously nicknamed the 'baked-bean bush', though the fruit actually has a very strong, sour, citrus flavour, with a delicious coastal aftertaste.

Habitat

Coastal dunes, cliffs and golf courses, mainly in the east, sometimes found on river banks and in roadside plantings.

Uses

The entire plant – leaves, berries, seeds, pollen and bark – has exceptional nutritional and medicinal properties. These have been highly prized in traditional Tibetan, Ayurvedic, Chinese and Russian medicine for centuries. Sea buckthorn is now attracting worldwide interest, with research into its ability to help the body adapt to stress, and its potential use in the prevention and treatment of cancer, liver and heart disease.

The fruit is very high in vitamins C (it has been found to be higher than in strawberry, kiwi, orange, tomato, carrot or hawthorn) and E. It is also rich in vitamins B1, B2 and K, beta-carotene, bioflavenoids, fatty acids/omega oils, minerals and phytosterols. All of this adds up to it being one of the most nutritionally complete fruits known. No wonder Genghis Khan

fed the juice to his armies and that Russian cosmonauts were given it to help them adapt to the stresses of life in space.

The main traditional uses are as an anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiviral, analgesic and antioxidant. It promotes wound healing.

In Russia and Scandinavia berries are traditionally used to make jams and jellies to serve with game (especially venison) and oily fish. They can also be used for salad dressings; incorporated into desserts such as ice cream and sorbet (especially good with those involving white chocolate, apparently); mixed with honey to make healthy elixirs, juices and cordials; fermented into wine and lambic beers, or steeped in vodka to make schnapps.

The seed oil is used topically for minor skin ailments including psoriasis, though it can also help reduce scarring, scalds and burns, including radiation burns. The oil absorbs UV light, so may have potential as a natural sunscreen. It contains palmitoleic acid, a fatty acid also found in human skin, so can be used for skin creams and soaps that will have a moisturising and healing effect. In practice the seed oil is difficult to extract as the oil content is fairly low, though you could try using a large stone mortar and pestle.

Sea buckthorn pollen is well known in Russia as a remedy for burns. In late spring the male bushes produce vibrant purple-green buds, which open to puff out clouds of beautiful dark orange, wind-borne pollen.

A tea can be made from the leaves but it's rather bland. Mix it with green tea or tastier herbs for a healthy drink. The leaves and bark contain sitosterol, tocopherol and many other bioactive compounds and are a slightly richer source of

flavonoids than the berries.

The plant has an important environmental use, for soil stabilising and enrichment. Its association with the michorriza *Frankia* enables it to fix atmospheric nitrogen, and its vigorous tap roots penetrate and extract valuable minerals from sea-washed sands. Sea buckthorn is really something of an alchemist – using sunlight to turn air, sand and water into a profusion of bright orange berries, oil-rich seeds, shimmering silvery leaves and magnificent gleaming thorns: true gold!

It is also a great foliage plant for arranging, and the wood burns well enough.

Harvesting

The berries are not fully ripe until they have been 'bletted' by the first frosts, as before this they have a very harsh astringency. Weathering produces a slightly sweeter, rounder flavour that is not to everyone's liking. Unripe berries are firm to the touch and easier to pick, and as they ripen they become increasingly soft until impossible to pick without bursting. At this point, with care and thick gloves (ideally leather as some types of rubber can dissolve in the very acidic juice!), they can be squeezed directly into suitable containers. These must be either stainless steel, enamelled, ceramic or glass as the juice is corrosive to metal.

Squeezing does not harm the plant, whereas cutting branches does, as fruit is carried on wood in its second year. Where there is a superabundance of bushes, cutting small quantities should be acceptable. It is easier and certainly less messy. When the branches are deep-frozen the berries will shake off intact, making a frosty day in winter an ideal time for a sea buckthorn foraging trip. These can go straight into the freezer,

as can fresh ones, and this is an ideal way to preserve the fruit until needed.

Recipes

TANGY PHEASANT STEW

This delicious recipe will serve four people.

1 pheasant

1 medium onion (chopped)

2 or 3 carrots (diced)

300ml/0.5 pint sea buckthorn berries (fresh or frozen)

85g/3oz red lentils

5g/1 teaspoon cumin

5g/1 teaspoon turmeric

2.5cm/1" fresh ginger (peeled and finely chopped)

1 clove garlic (crushed)

430ml/0.75 pint vegetable stock

Freshly ground black pepper

25ml/1 tablespoon olive oil

Pluck, draw and cut the pheasant into four or cut off breast meat and legs, skinning and cutting them into several chunks. Mash the berries and strain through a sieve to remove the seeds, warm in a little water first if necessary.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan and gently cook the onions.

Add the pheasant and brown the meat for a minute or two, stirring in the spices, ginger and garlic. Add the carrots, lentils, half the sea buckthorn, stock and pepper. Bring to the boil then reduce heat, cover and simmer gently for around forty-five minutes to an hour (checking that the meat is cooked through properly). Add the remaining sea buckthorn for the last ten minutes of cooking time.

Serve with brown basmati and wild rice and fresh watercress or steamed dark greens.

SEA BUCKTHORN SALAD DRESSING

Mash some berries and strain through a sieve to remove the seeds. Mix with an equal or double quantity of olive oil according to the sourness of the berries, brown sugar or honey, garlic, English or Dijon mustard, salt and black pepper.

SEA BUCKTHORN WINTER WARMER

Put a handful or two of frozen berries in a teapot with half an inch of chopped fresh ginger and a quarter teaspoon of dried turmeric. Pour on boiling water and leave to steep for ten minutes. Strain to drink, sweetening with honey if desired. It's great for banishing colds and arthritis.

Willow Walker

WILD RASPBERRY

Rubus idaeus

Wild raspberry grows so well in much of Scotland that it's easy to overlook. It does best in a cool climate, with abundant fruits and a fine flavour making it a commonplace luxury. The blissful little fruits grow on prickly canes with white flowers; they ripen to red, or sometimes yellow. The leaves are dark green above and slightly woolly underneath, in contrast to the smooth white of cultivated varieties. The latter have huge berries, by comparison, but with a fraction of the flavour. For both these reasons, wild raspberries especially lend themselves to being eaten *in situ* or brought home just to use sparingly: a scattering transforms a salad or a dessert; a sprinkling is enough to turn porridge into a feast. Obligingly, they grow along footpaths, backroads, in sunny glades and field edges; anywhere that approximates a natural woodland edge. Always look out for them when camping or hiking in the summer – unless you're intent on reaching your destination on time!

The yellow varieties that sometimes occur (a natural variant of the same species) are an extra treat. The flavour can be

exquisitely delicate and they are especially worth including in garden planting or a fruiting hedge, as the lack of ripening red may fool the birds, giving you a bigger share of the harvest. Wild raspberries, whether red or yellow, can do well as part of a hedge, trimmed to shape once a year, and providing occasional berries to the passer-by over a long season. (As always, choose very carefully, take very sparingly and ask permission, if uprooting plants from the wild.)

The youngest leaves are tasty if chewed thoughtfully, and can also be used to make a tea with a satisfyingly rounded flavour (see p139 in Wines, Teas and Cordials for how to make it).

Emma Chapman

WYCH ELM

Ulmus glabra

Wych elm is a genuinely native tree and since its Europe-wide decline the Scottish Highlands represent the last stronghold of this once widespread species. It is also a prolific seeder and in spring the fruits, which are small seeds surrounded by a thin green wing, make a delicious nutty snack. Harvest before they grow too large and papery if you want to use them in a Chinese-inspired recipe: dipping them in flour and steaming them like dim sum. Later, the seed is tasty but the wing around it becomes too dry to eat. The young leaves are also quite palatable and although probably never more than an occasional nibble for humans, they were a valuable fodder for livestock. Indeed, a Gaelic (Irish) name for elm is *cara ceathra*, meaning 'friend of cattle'.

Elm inner bark has been eaten as a famine food in times of scarcity. Slippery elm bark is widely available in health food shops and herbalists as a rather bland food supplement, but it

is from a North American species, *Ulmus rubra*, and is expensive to buy: a case of a famine food becoming a luxury item. In a
small quantity it can be used to thicken a milk pudding, flavoured with birch syrup and sprinkled with hazelnuts to make a woodland treat, if not a wholly native one.

Ian Edwards

OTHER USEFUL FRUITS AND NUTS

BARBERRY
Berberis vulgaris

Barberry crops up in old hedgerows in the Lowlands, probably as a garden escape, although it is native to England, so it's hard to be sure. It is a tall, spiny shrub with pale twigs and rather papery leaves, which occur in clusters. In summer its tiny yellow flowers give way to pretty bunches of long, pendulous, orange fruits that are too sour and tangy to be enjoyable raw, but cook well to make jellies or sauces for meat. Like many of our tart berries (sea buckthorn being another prime example), it is crammed full of potentially useful compounds. If you know where barberries grow, it is worth collecting and preserving some for winter use against colds, aches and pains.

BEECH
Fagus sylvatica

Beech trees need no description. Their seed, known as ‘mast’, does not set every year, so the leathery, slightly spiky, oval fruits often open, flower-like, to cast empty seeds. But when these neat, three-sided nuts are plump and full, they are worth gathering. It’s arduous, because the beech nuts are tiny, yet the contents are tasty as a snack and can be used lightly toasted instead of pumpkin or sunflower seeds and scattered on salad.

BIRD CHERRY
Prunus padus

One of the prettiest of trees in springtime, bird cherry is not widely known. It is more shrubby than the gean, and has spectacular drooping spikes of small, star-shaped, white flowers in the spring. People mistake it at that time of year for a garden escape and at other times fail to notice the tree. However, if you are keen on making flavoured liqueurs, make a mental note of a bird cherry when it is in flower, and return in late summer to harvest some of the small, black cherries. Steeped in gin for a few months, they will impart a flavour of cherry with a touch of almond, which makes an interesting alternative to the more familiar sloe gin.

DAMSON
Prunus domestica, subspecies insititia

Birds eating fruit can cause garden plums to escape into hedgerows and turn up as oval black damsons or, occasionally, as green or yellow fruits growing on green-stemmed trees. They flower later than cherry plums and the leaves are larger, resembling those of domestic plum trees. They are well worth collecting as their flavour is sour but intense. They make excellent jam or jelly, the latter being an easier option as it avoids the need to remove a myriad of small stones by hand. Another prime use is as an alternative to sloes, to make a liqueur. Damson gin is well flavoured and usually ready to drink by Christmas from autumn manufacture.

HEATHLAND BERRIES

CLOUDBERRY Rubus chamaemorus

COWBERRY Vaccinium vitis-idaea

CRANBERRY Vaccinium oxycoccus

CROWBERRY Empetrum nigrum

The moorland berries you may find alongside the prolific and useful blaeberry are edible but, for one reason or another, not very rewarding. Cloudberries grow in damp bogs on hill tops but rarely set seed. When they do, the fruit tends to be sour and tasteless here, quite unlike the cloudberries found in Scandinavia. It is best left for the birds, which will probably help to disperse the plant. Cranberries taste better but are small, and never prolific. They are a different species from the luscious North American one that we are accustomed to

buying. Cowberries are even smaller red berries, also known as red bilberries, which don't taste of very much. Crowberries are small, intensely black and shiny, and suffer from the same problem. All in all, these heathland berries are only good to taste as you pass, making sure, of course, that you have your identification correct. Small black or red berries growing in situations other than heathland may well be poisonous.

SWEET CHESTNUT
Castanea sativa

Not a native, and not common in Scotland. Sweet chestnut deserves a mention because it turns up in policy planting in the south of the country. When the trees set and ripen seed it is well worth gathering, even though the nuts may not be large. Collect them when the spiny green balls fall, using gloves to extract the nuts as the thin spikes are ferocious. Use them soon after gathering as many will prove to be harbouring insect eggs that will hatch in your warm home and start to devour the deliciously sweet nut. Roast them and scoff them immediately, or boil them, remove the shells and serve as a trimming to game stew, or turn them into soup. They are a wonderful resource if you can come by them.

CHAPTER FIVE

WILD MUSHROOMS

Wild mushrooms are abundant and delicious but collecting them frightens many people. In this chapter we have tried to draw up the safest possible list of species that are easy to identify, do not have many lookalikes to fool you, and that taste good, too. A second list of species names those which are regularly used by many, but which are more problematic for one reason or another.

However, be aware that you cannot just drift into mushroom foraging without learning something about the subject and practising your skills. You will need good, illustrated field guides and it will be of great help if you can talk to someone knowledgeable and experienced. One of the things you must do is learn some of the basic terminology that field guides and experts use, so that you can differentiate gills, spore tubes, stems, veils and so forth, and understand what is being described.

The Safe mushroom picking code below makes suggestions on how you can acquire the skills you will need. At the end of the chapter is The Scottish wild mushroom code, which tells you how to collect in a responsible way that will not damage the environment where they grow.

Safe mushroom picking code

1 Attend a fungus foray with an expert.

2 Acquire the best books (*Mushrooms* by Roger Phillips, or *How to Identify Edible Mushrooms* by Patrick Harding, Tony Lyon and Gill Tomblin). Take the books with you when you're out foraging.

3 Take into account where and when you find specimens as habitat and season are essential elements in positive identification of species.

4 Using the guides, and your observations about season and place, collect some good specimens of what you think are edible mushrooms and take them to someone who genuinely knows more than you do for confirmation. Never work on mere assumptions about others' expertise.

5 Avoid mushrooms with maggots, and old specimens, as they may be contaminated with other fungi or bacteria.

6 Don't mix species in a single collecting basket or bag in case you contaminate the good with the toxic. Baskets are best for collection as you may help propagation as you walk. Besides, plastic bags damage mushrooms, so all you are left with is mush.

7 Forget about ancient maxims and rules of thumb. You cannot identify a field mushroom by whether or not the cap peels easily or decide that any species is edible because something (probably a slug) has already eaten part of it.

8 Once you have positive identification of a species, take some home and cook them, but always start with a small

quantity, in case you have an individual reaction to that species. This is unlikely with the core group suggested below, but within the wider groupings of edible species, there are several, like wood blewits, horse mushrooms, and parasol mushrooms, that might act as gastric irritants in certain individuals.

9 Some people keep a specimen of each variety of mushroom that they are about to eat, to aid identification should they have got it wrong. This might be sensible to do with field mushrooms, as there are many similar species, some of which are gastric irritants. With the other five species on the core list, it may not be necessary.

10 Observe The Scottish wild mushroom code (see p132) to make sure that your activities are responsible and sustainable.

Scotland's best wild mushrooms

This section covers the best tasting and most easily identified mushrooms. They do not have dangerous lookalikes, except for the field mushroom, which is more of a challenge but also the most commonly gathered species. However, if the cautions are heeded, this species can also be safely gathered. Remember to use clear identification guides alongside this book.

CEP

Boletus edulis

Cep – also commonly known as porcini, penny bun or bolete – is the queen of the wild mushroom world. If you think you've never eaten any wild mushrooms, but have enjoyed commercial mushroom soup, you will almost certainly have tasted them. They are frequently the basic ingredient.

The name 'penny bun' may be out of step with inflation, but it describes well the brown, domed shape of the cap above the distinctly white (though brown-streaked), bulbous stem. The underside of the cap is spongy with pores, not gills, and starts off white, becoming straw-coloured and finally a little olive as the
mushroom ages, though the colour can be quite variable. They do not discolour when bruised. There are several similar edible *Boletus* species, though none quite as good as *Boletus edulis* itself. The only species that you wouldn't want to eat, which might be confused with *Boletus edulis*, is the bitter

bolete *Tylopilus felleus*, but it has gills that are generally a dirty pink and they bruise brown. *Tylopilus felleus* is not poisonous but tastes disgusting.

Habitat

Ceps can often be found in rides and clearings in coniferous, deciduous or mixed woodlands, especially beech, oak, birch or pine. They prefer acid soils and are often found in association with fly agaric, so it is worth searching more closely when you see the conspicuous red and white cap of the fly agaric.

Uses

Good to eat (try slicing and frying them with garlic), but they can also be dried. Dried ceps can be rehydrated before use, or ground into powder and used for flavouring.

Harvesting

Gather in the summer to autumn, depending on when they appear (which in turn will depend on temperature and humidity). Avoid individuals infested with maggots, to which this species is rather prone. As the stem of the cep is bulbous, you don't want to lose good eating by cutting the stem off; instead insert the tip of a knife under the mushroom and gently lever it up.

Recipes

CEP MUSHROOM SOUP

1 large onion (chopped)

1 medium potato (peeled and chopped)

225g/8oz ceps

1 generous tablespoon butter

750ml/1.5 pints milk

Fresh thyme and parsley

Salt and pepper

This recipe serves four people. Soften the onion and ceps in butter until soft. Add the milk and potato and bring to the boil. Simmer until the potatoes soften. Blend and season with the herbs and salt.

CHANTERELLE

Cantharellus cibarius

Chanterelles are amongst the most prized of wild mushrooms in Scotland. A small industry exists on collecting them for the restaurant market. They are small, measuring 3–10cm across the irregular, funnel-shaped cap. The caps can be either orange or yellow, as can the false gills, which look more like shallow furrows extending down its stem and are delightfully described by the authors of *How to Identify Edible Mushrooms* as 'fan vaulting'. Chanterelles have a very distinctive fruity smell, likened to apricots.

The false chanterelle (*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*) is more orange in colour, thinner stemmed, and lacks that fruity smell. It's not seriously poisonous but can cause gastric upsets in certain individuals.

Of more concern is the fact that a poisoning did occur in Scotland in 2010, when some people confused *Cortinarius speciossimus* with chanterelle and ended up on kidney dialysis.

They cannot have followed the wild mushroom collection code, because the two species are very different. Always check your identification guides to make sure. Once you have identified chanterelles, and tasted them, you should gain confidence in collecting them. They are well worth learning about!

Habitat

Chanterelles are found in many kinds of woodlands, including beech, oak, birch and pine, and in the relative warmth of young sitka spruce plantations where the branches almost reach the ground. They prefer acid soils and are more common in Scotland than further south. You can often find them on sloping ground near the edge of woods, where the vegetation is not too high. Where you find them will depend on how dry the year is: in a wet year they will be on well-drained sites, but if it has been very dry, on stream banks and in wet flushes.

Uses

One of the most delicious of our wild mushrooms, and rarely maggot-infested, they are a real delicacy. Try stewing them slowly in milk, frying with garlic or using them as the main ingredient in a wild mushroom ‘risotto’. This species can be dried but it changes in taste with this process. If you want to preserve the excellent flavour of the fresh mushrooms, freeze them individually on open trays and bag them up once they are frozen.

Harvesting

September and October are the prime months for gathering

chanterelles, but they frequently occur earlier and have been gathered in Scotland between July and December.

Recipes

WILD MUSHROOM FLAN WITH OATMEAL PASTRY

For the pastry:

115g/4oz plain flour

115g/4oz fine oatmeal (or porridge oats smashed up in a food processor)

115g/4oz butter

1 egg

1 level teaspoon salt

Rub fat into the flour and oats, either by hand or in a food processor. Mix in the egg, adding a little cold water if necessary to make it bind into a soft, but not sticky, dough. Allow the pastry to rest in the fridge for an hour. Then roll out and cover a reasonably deep 23cm/9" flan tin. It is best to prick this and blind-bake it for fifteen minutes in a hot oven (220˚C/425˚F/Reg 7).

For the filling:

170g/6oz field mushrooms or ceps (chopped)

115g/4oz chanterelles and/or hedgehog mushrooms (in large pieces)

1 medium onion

60g/2oz butter

1 heaped tablespoon flour

275ml/0.5 pint milk

1 egg

1 heaped tablespoon cheddar or parmesan cheese (grated)

Mace or nutmeg

Salt and pepper to taste

For this recipe, you need two frying pans. In one, soften the chanterelles or hedgehog mushrooms, using half the butter. In the second pan, using the other half of the butter, soften the onion then add the chopped field mushrooms or ceps and continue cooking until they are soft. Scatter in the flour, stirring all the time, then add the milk and cheese, followed by the seasoning. When the mixture has cooled a little, stir in the egg and finally add the chanterelles or hedgehog pieces. Pour into the blind-baked crust and cook in a medium oven (190˚C/375˚F/Reg 5) for twenty to twenty-five minutes until the filling has set.

FIELD MUSHROOM

Agaricus campestris

Although this is the most gathered species in Scotland, and those who know it have little difficulty with it, the field mushroom actually raises more problems of identification than the other five mushrooms in this core group. There are forty or more species of *Agaricus*, some of them very similar to field mushrooms, so you must be alert to the obvious, and troublesome, lookalikes.

Field mushrooms emerge as neat, white buttons, like the cultivated variety we are used to. As they develop, which they can do very rapidly, the cap expands and flattens, turning beige. The gills, which start pink, become brown as the mushroom ages, and the spores are brown. The flesh is white when first cut but colours pink or 'mushroomy'.

Beware any field-growing mushroom that colours yellow on cutting or bruising as it will probably be *Agaricus xanthodermous*,

the yellow-staining mushroom, which can cause severe sickness and diarrhoea. Also beware any field-growing mushroom with white or very pale pink gills that do not brown with age. If it doesn't look quite right, reject it, as it could be the (fortunately rare) *Leucoagricus leucobites*, which also causes gastric upsets. Very large specimens of what appear to be field mushrooms may well be horse mushrooms, *Agaricus arvensis*, which are safe and good to eat. Don't be put off by the slightly yellow tinge on the cap of this last species. It is when cut and bruised flesh turns yellow, particularly at the base of the stem, that you know that you have a poisonous yellow-stainer.

Habitat

Field mushrooms are found on grazed or mown grassland, from the Borders to the Outer Isles, especially where cows or horses are pastured. Do not assume that similar looking species growing in woods or near trees are necessarily field mushrooms, as there are several woodland species not mentioned above with which they could be confused.

Uses

Use as you would cultivated mushrooms. They do not dry particularly well, so are best eaten fresh, though frozen ones from a bumper harvest can make satisfactory soup later in the year.

Harvesting

Field mushrooms tend to occur in the same locations each year, although some years they are profuse, and others absent. The sudden appearance of the white domes of the young field

mushrooms is significant in the wild harvest calendar. It is not easy to say when in the summer this will occur, as it seems to depend on a subtle combination of temperature and moisture. Field mushrooms can be found from June until November, with the peak time usually, but not necessarily, occurring in September.

Recipes

MUSHROOM KETCHUP

1.35kg/3lb field mushrooms

75g/3oz salt

1 teaspoon peppercorns

1 teaspoon allspice

0.5 teaspoon mace

0.5 teaspoon ginger

0.25 teaspoon cloves

0.25 teaspoon cinnamon

570ml/1 pint vinegar

Break the mushrooms into pieces, sprinkle them with salt and leave in a bowl overnight. Rinse them and mash them or process them briefly in a food processor. Add the spices tied in muslin and the vinegar, using malt for a traditional taste or cider vinegar for a lighter one. Simmer in a closed pan for about half an hour, then remove the bag of spices.

Pour the mixture into hot, sterilised bottles. Cover with metal caps but only screw them very loosely. The bottles now need

to be simmered in a water bath for a further half-hour, and steam must be allowed to escape from them. Place them in an open pressure cooker with the bottom tray in place. Do not allow the bottles to touch each other or the sides of the pan, or they will crack. Fill the pan with hot water and bring to the boil. At the end of this boiling, carefully remove the bottles, screw down the lids, and leave to cool. The mushroom ketchup should keep well all year.

GIANT PUFFBALL

Calvatia gigantea

As one author has commented of the giant puffball, the only confusion in identification that might occur is with a football! These mushrooms vary from large (15cm diameter) to vast (75cm) and have no stalk. They are spherical or pumpkin-shaped, and their skin is smooth with a leathery texture. Older specimens turn yellow, and then brown, until the puffball comes away from its slender root, rolls away, and bursts to shed thousands of millions of spores. Unless you have an army to feed, go for a smaller specimen, or you will get very tired of its firm, white, mushroom-tasting flesh. Most other grassland puffball species are also edible when young, but earthballs are not. Check your identification guides.

Habitat

Usually to be found on grassland, in gardens and at hedge bottoms, often in richer soils and frequently associated with nettles and disturbed ground.

Uses

In the past, giant puffball was dried and used as tinder and to staunch wounds. These days it is seen as a useful food by those fortunate enough to find good specimens. The simplest way to eat it is to slice thickly and sauté in butter. It can also be made into soup.

Harvesting

Look for young specimens which are still firm. As the mushroom matures it becomes more squishy to the touch and is less good to eat. The flesh should still be white, not starting to yellow as it does when the puffball is creating the spores that it is designed to shed.

Recipes

PUFFBALL STEAKS WITH BACON

2 giant puffball slices about 0.5cm thick for each person

1 egg or more if you have lots of puffball (and people to eat it!)

2 slices bacon per person

Clean the puffball, removing any damaged sections, but do not peel it. Cut into slices about 0.5 cm thick. Beat an egg with a little water, salt and pepper. Dip slices of puffball in the egg mixture and then in fine oatmeal or breadcrumbs. Fry bacon in a pan and then fry the puffball slices in the bacon fat until they are browned and crisp on the outside. This makes a delicious breakfast.

HORN OF PLENTY

Craterellus cornucopioides

This species is unprepossessing and difficult to find until you get your eye in, as they look like the dry and withered remains of larger species. You have to search in deep leaf litter to spot the leathery, grey-black trumpets. They are roughly similar in shape to chanterelles (to which they are related) though generally smaller, being 2–8cm across, and with hollow centres. They usually grow in large groups, so if you are lucky enough to find some, you should be able to collect enough to be worthwhile.

The main lookalike is *Russula nigricans*, which, despite being funnel-shaped, is much fleshier than the horn of plenty. It is not poisonous – though not worth eating, either. *Cantharellus cinereus* is another possible lookalike as it is similar in size and shape, but it has wrinkled false gills like the chanterelle and is not often found in broadleaved woodlands.

Habitat

Deciduous woods, often with beech or hazel. It is often difficult to see against a background of leaf litter.

Uses

This is a real delicacy. The flavour is strong and good, so horn of plenty can be used to flavour soups, stews and stir-fry vegetables. It is best chopped very small, as the leathery texture can be tough. The species can be easily dried as it naturally contains little moisture.

Harvesting

This is a late season species, occurring in September and October, so it can be found on expeditions to collect hazelnuts or beech mast.

WOOD HEDGEHOG

Hydnum repandum

Where wood hedgehogs (also known as hedgehog fungus) grow, they often do so in quantity and fairly dependably, year by year. This makes the harvest an exciting moment: there can be reasonable certainty as you set out for a known site that you will return with enough to cook, share, and even dry or freeze for winter use.

The mushroom is very distinctive. Its medium-sized, irregular, pale yellowish or putty-colour cap shows up well, even against beech leaf litter. The curious prickles from which it is named are easy to spot as they are paler than the cap, usually white, although sometimes pinkish or buff. Hedgehog is not the only species with spines instead of pores or gills. There are other, rare, tooth fungi that are either much smaller, or very definitely brown, so you are unlikely to confuse them. If you are in any doubt, avoid collecting in Scots pine woodland.

Habitat

Deciduous or coniferous woodlands, although it seems to favour beech. It is often on steep slopes, sometimes with moss or wood rush.

Uses

Although it is very good to eat, some people prefer to blanch it first to remove some of the slight bitterness. This is useful if you are making soup. Hedgehogs can be served on their own, sliced and lightly fried with garlic. Remove the spines of old specimens as they stay hard, even when cooked. This species freezes well, and can also be pickled.

Harvesting

September is the peak month for finding quantities of wood hedgehogs, but you can often gather between August and November. This mushroom is best cut as it is difficult to clean the spines if they get soiled by the leaf litter that invariably comes up with roots of specimens that are pulled.

Recipes

WILD MUSHROOM RISOTTO MADE WITH BARLEY

Barley is our locally grown grain that makes an excellent alternative to rice. It is cheaper, keeps our spending in the local economy and is easier to cook to perfection. This recipe serves four.

250g/8oz ceps/hedgehog/chanterelles (chopped)

1 large onion or 3 shallots (chopped)

2 cloves garlic (chopped or pressed)

350g/12oz pot barley or pearl barley (or rice)

600ml/1 generous pint hot vegetable stock

100ml/4 fl oz white wine or dry cider

Knob of butter for frying (or mix butter and olive oil)

30g/1oz grated parmesan cheese (grated)

Sauté the onions in butter and oil, then add chopped mushrooms and fry gently until they soften. Add garlic, followed by the barley. Turn this over in the mushroom mix for a minute or two, then add the stock, stirring all the time. Lastly add the wine or cider. Bring to a simmer then cover with a lid and cook for around forty minutes in a moderate oven. Check towards the end of cooking and add more liquid if necessary. Before serving,
grind in some pepper and stir in the parmesan. Garnish with shreds of wild thyme.

OTHER EDIBLE MUSHROOMS

Now for some other species that people consider worth eating. These notes are meant to guide you to the main positives and negatives of the most commonly eaten species.

BLEWIT
Lepista species

Good, but the field blewit is not common in Scotland, whilst the wood blewit is occasionally problematic for certain people, causing gastric upsets.

BOLETE
Leccinum, Suillius and Boletus species

There are members of each of these families that are fully edible. Some people especially like the orange birch bolete, *L. versipelle*, which has firm flesh but is not as well flavoured as *B. edulis*. Its relative, the brown birch bolete, *L. scabrum*, is less worthwhile.

Young specimens of the bay bolete, *B. badius*, are tasty although their texture can be soggy. Avoid any that stain blue. Slippery Jack, *S. luteus*, has a slimy covering to the cap that makes it distinctive, but it is not appealing in taste or texture.

CHICKEN OF THE WOODS
Laetiporus sulphureus

This is easy to identify and has lots of flavour, but it can cause gastric upsets in some people.

HONEY FUNGUS
Armillaria mellea

Although tasty when well-cooked, this fungus is a menace to trees and collecting it at all risks spreading it. Best left alone unless you already have it in your garden.

HORSE MUSHROOM

See the field mushroom entry on p119.

JELLY EAR
Auricularia auricula-judae

These are easy to identify but are tough and rubbery, without much flavour.

MOREL
Morchella esculanta

This is a delicious spring-growing species with a honeycomb cap but, as it prefers limestone soils, it is not common in Scotland.
It can sometimes be found in broadleaved woodland clearings with ash and elm. The false morel (*Gyromitra esculanta*) looks very similar and appears at the same time of the year, but it is extremely poisonous. The edible species has a single chamber in its hollow stem. The toxic one is multi-chambered, like its rather irregular cap. Take care to slice specimens and examine them closely, and to wash your hands if you have picked a false morel. Also take particular care to avoid old specimens of true morel, as these can cause poisoning.

OYSTER MUSHROOM
Pleurotus ostreatus

Though now familiar from commercially grown examples, this bracket fungus is not very easy to distinguish from other

similar ones. Only the youngest growths are good to eat, and they do not have a strong flavour.

PARASOL MUSHROOM
Macrolepiota procera

It is a shame that this large, delicious and quite common species has a near relative that can cause digestive upsets and skin rashes. The shaggy parasol is slightly shorter than the true parasol and has a smoother, shorter stem without the mottled brown markings of its edible cousin. Take great care if you try to experiment with parasols, and have good identification guides to hand all the time. Avoid small specimens as these may be a similar genus, *Lepiota*, the dapperlings, which are poisonous.

PUFFBALL

See the giant puffball entry on p122

SAFFRON MILKCAP
Lactarius deliciosus

This is much prized in Eastern Europe but as it is difficult to distinguish from similar *Lactarius* species, some of them bitter and others poisonous, so only collect saffron milkcap if you can have it reliably authenticated. The yellow milk that it oozes is only a partial guide to its identity. The texture is said to be crisp and good.

ST GEORGE'S MUSHROOM
Calocybe gambosa

This may be a tasty early species with a good, firm texture, but there is a lookalike that that can be deadly poisonous: the red-staining inocybe. Both occur early in the year in similar grassland, or sparsely wooded habitats. The real danger of confusion would occur with young specimens, when the warning signs of the red-staining on bruising would not be observed.

SHAGGY INKCAP
Coprinus comatus

This is a common species of roadsides, wastelands and gardens. Its main problem is its cousin, the common inkcap, which is dangerous if eaten with alcohol. The two species are very similar, save for the shaggier top of the edible one. If you are confident of your identification, eat young specimens and cook them soon after collecting them, as they tend to deliquesce. But don't drink wine with them, just in case!

WOOD CAULIFLOWER
Sparassis crispa

These are huge and superbly flavoured, but very rare. They occur only on the bases of old pine trees, so are sometimes found in the Highlands. Although it is actually easy to identify and distinguish from other coral-like fungi, take care with this as some of the slightly similar ones can cause violent sickness and diarrhoea. Only take a small lobe from any one fungus: it will supply several people with a tasty starter.

Drying mushrooms

If you have an old 60W incandescent light bulb, it is all you need as a heat source for drying several trays of wild mushrooms at once.

Take an old biscuit tin, punch a few holes in the side and find a way of feeding the light cord and bulb into it. On top of this place a baking tray. Aluminium is best but hard to come by, so a lightweight Swiss roll tin will do. Clean the mushrooms and slice them if they are large *Boletus*. This is not necessary with chanterelles. Spread them on cake racks. In a warm, dry room, you can stack three of these on top of each other, providing you change their positions every few hours.

The drying process takes a day or two and may need to be completed by spreading the nearly dry mushrooms (which will have reduced in volume) directly on top of the baking

tray and leaving them for a further few hours. Cool them completely before storing them in screw-topped jars labelled with the species.

The Scottish wild mushroom code

The countryside is a working landscape. Please be aware of your own safety and follow the countryside and access codes. In accordance with this code there are some instances, such as commercial harvesting, where you must make contact with the land manager before you collect mushrooms.

By respecting the natural environment you can help to manage and conserve the countryside. When collecting mushrooms for any purpose, please consider the following points:

What to collect

- Wildlife, especially insects, need mushrooms too, so only pick what you will use.
- Some mushrooms are poisonous and others rare and should not be collected – only collect what you know and take a field guide with you to identify mushrooms where you find them.
- Some species are vulnerable, so please consider whether there is an alternative species that is more common that might suit your purpose.

How to collect

- Allow mushrooms to release spores, do not pick mushrooms until the cap has opened out and leave those that are past their best.
- The main part of the mushroom is below the surface; take care not to damage or trample it and not to disturb its surroundings.
- Scatter trimmings discreetly in the same area as the mushroom came from.

Where to collect

- Before you collect mushrooms at a nature reserve please always seek advice from the manager, as special conditions may apply. Visit www.snh.gov.uk to find out more about protected areas in Scotland.

If you own or manage land

- Mushrooms are a critical part of the natural cycle in grassland and woodlands; if these are compromised, all elements of the ecosystem will be affected. Be aware that your management activities may affect mushrooms.

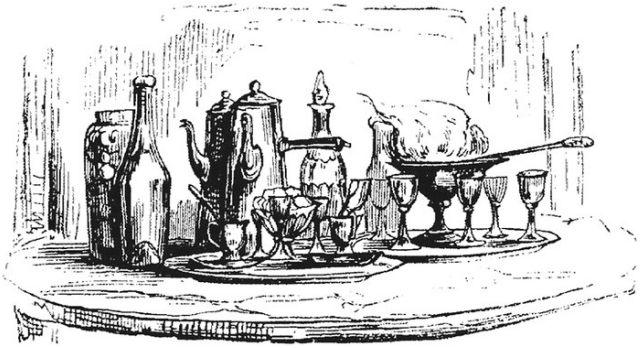
If you run a foray or collect for scientific purposes

- Remember to ensure the safety of your party; make contact with the land manager in advance of your visit.
- Remember to give a record of what you have found to the land manager and explain the significance of your

findings.

Fi Martynoga with Alison Dyke

CHAPTER SIX



WINES, TEAS AND CORDIALS

Many, but not all, of the plants in this chapter have been written about elsewhere in the book, so you will find some of the information, about teas for instance, in the form of a list for easy reference.

TEAS

Herb teas are best made by pouring boiling water over the plant material in a warmed teapot or mug and leaving it to infuse for at least five minutes. The quantity of leaves or fruits needed varies according both to the species and to personal taste, so start with the suggested amount and then adapt to your own liking. The list has been selected for pleasure: they are pleasant to drink and make a viable alternative to caffeine-laden Indian tea. They may also have pharmacological properties, which are described in more detail in the chapter A Medicine Chest from the Wild. Purely therapeutic teas are not included in this section.

Recipes

CRAB APPLE

Slice apples with peel on, simmer for an hour and sweeten with honey, strain and drink. Remember an apple a day keeps the doctor away!

ELDERBERRY

If flavoured well, especially with lemon, this is antiviral, so

use at the onset of cold or flu-like symptoms. It is also good for coughs. Use one teaspoon of dried berries and a slice of lemon per person.

ELDERFLOWER

Delicious, flowery and useful against hayfever or signs of a cold. Use one scant teaspoon of dried flowers and a slice of lemon per person.

HEATHER

Collect flowers on a sunny day and infuse them in hot water with a sprig of lemon balm.

LIME BLOSSOM

Lightly honey flavoured if picked when the blossom is fully out. Use four dried blossoms (bracts and flower heads) per person.

MEADOWSWEET

This tea can be a little bitter as it is high in tannins, but it's soothing to an acid gut, so try adding honey to make it more palatable. Use one scant teaspoon of dried flowers per person.

MINT

Water mint makes a strong tea. Make sure the water is really boiling to kill any liver flukes. One sprig is enough for two cups of tea.
In the summer you can wait for the pot to cool, then add cucumber and lemon to make a deliciously refreshing drink.

NETTLE

It's worth acquiring a taste for nettle tea, which has a homely, earthy flavour. Try two fresh nettle tops to a pot or one teaspoon of dried leaves.

ROSE HIP

This has a delicious, autumnal taste and is not sour like the

commercial rose hip tea bags. Infuse 10–12 whole dried hips for at least two hours in a thermos flask. Alternatively, if you have the patience to halve the hips, scrape out the seeds, cut the flesh into strips, and dry them, you can make it more quickly in a pot. However, it still takes about fifteen minutes to brew, so you will need a tea cosy.

SPRUCE

Collect a few young twigs and boil them in a pan for a few minutes. Leave to infuse for a further five minutes, strain and drink.

SWEET CICELY

The leaves have a sweet, aniseed taste and make an excellent tisane. It is good blended with honey but sweet enough in its own right. Try one large sprig per mug.

WILD MARJORAM

This is savoury and refreshing, traditionally drunk in the Clyde Valley. Use a couple of fresh sprigs per pot, or a good teaspoon of dried leaves.

WILD RASPBERRY LEAF

Erica Hollis

If you wrap fresh raspberry leaves in a tea towel and let them ferment for two days before you dry them, the tea will taste stronger and will have a rounder raspberry flavour, which is pleasing. Its medicinal effect is ‘drying’, so it will help with mild diarrhoea or heavy periods. For this reason it should not be drunk too frequently, unless prescribed by a qualified herbalist. Use one teaspoon of dried leaves per cup.

YARROW

This is surprisingly palatable but also pharmacologically active. Use at the onset of flu-like symptoms or simply as an anytime
alternative to brown tea. Use one sprig from a fresh plant (whole leaf or small flower head) or a scant teaspoon of dried leaves per person.

BIRCH

Birch leaves and twigs can be infused, although the resulting tea is unusual and somewhat bitter to most tastes. Try it sweetened with honey.

This last tea is offered out of alphabetical order as it a curiosity worth trying, but not likely to be on anyone's list of favourite drinks!

SAPS

Birch trees can be tapped in the spring for their watery semisweet sap, which can be evaporated to create a syrup, made into birch beer or birch sap wine, and drunk plain or fermented as a health drink. Like birch bark or leaf tea, it is used to treat skin, kidney and bladder complaints. The essential oil extracted from birch 'tar' (the late sap) has a very strong, smoky scent reminiscent of coal tar and was traditionally used in medicinal soaps to treat eczema. To tap a birch tree for sap you will need:

5-litre plastic bottle

A length of small-bore siphon tube (from a wine-making supplier)

Some strapping to attach the bottle and tube to the tree

An augur or large-bore drill

Cotton wool to stop off the top of the bottle

A series of corks or different diameter, in the hope that one

will act as a bung once you have taken some sap

On a fine March day, drill a hole 3cm deep into a well-grown birch tree, making sure that you angle the hole downwards into the tree, so that the tube will stay in more readily. Strap the bottle securely below it and insert the tube into both it and the hole, securing it where necessary. A plug of cotton wool will help the tube to stay in position and will deter insects. Leave for the sap to collect over a few hours but be sure not to take more than three or four litres. Once you have enough sap, remove the tube and force a cork into the hole you drilled. Hammer it home to be sure that the tree does not continue to leak its lifeblood away.

Recipes

BIRCH SYRUP

Boil between one and three litres of birch sap slowly in a wide pan. This is best done outside on a bonfire, as it is a fuel-intensive process and generates a great deal of steam. Once the liquid has reduced to half its volume, put it in a bain-marie (a water bath) to prevent it from catching. The birch syrup is ready when it has reduced to a tenth of its original quantity. Early in the season the sap produces a light syrup without a strong flavour, so if you want the true flavour of birch trees, wait until a little later in the season. This will vary from place to place and from year to year.

The sap of sycamore and maples can be used in the same way. None of the trees that grow in Scotland produces a syrup as sweet as the sugar maple of Canada, but experimenting with small amounts of sap from these trees can be an interesting thing to do with children.

SPRUCE BEER

This is adapted from an eighteenth century Canadian recipe and is untried!

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

10g/0.25oz hops

10g/0.25oz root ginger

110g/4oz spruce shoots

450g/1lb dark brown sugar

Yeast

Put the water, hops, ginger, spruce shoots and sugar in a large pan and heat to boiling, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Simmer until the hops sink to the bottom, then remove from the heat and strain into a clean bucket. Allow to cool to blood heat, then add a yeast culture from a brewing shop. Cover and leave for two days. At this point pour into sterilised screw-top bottles. Leave upright and put aside for at least five days before drinking.

WINES

If you have not experimented with making wine at home, then it is worth buying a book on the subject. There is much to learn about types of yeast, pectolytic enzymes for breaking down fruits to extract the juice, sterilisation methods, and dealing with problems of cloudiness or even unwanted moulds. The National Federation of Women's Institutes (of England) published a book decades ago called *Wines, Syrups and Cordials*, edited by FW Beech. It is available on internet second-hand book sites such as www.abebooks. co.uk for mere pence, and it contains a wealth of good sense and fine recipes.

A general winemaking method

If you are impatient and have foraged materials in hand that need to be used immediately, here is a potted guide to a general winemaking method that can be used with the recipes given below. The minimum equipment that you will need is:

25-litre or 5-gallon brewing bucket with a lid (or a smaller one if you never make more than one gallon at a time)

Some 5-litre or 1-gallon demijohns

Airlocks

A siphon tube

A sterilising agent, usually sodium metabisulphate, but Milton is good and easier to use

Wine yeast (and possibly yeast nutrient)

Wine bottles with corks that fit, or screw tops that can be sterilised (usually with boiling water as the agents above react badly with metal)

You will also need a warm place to ensure vigorous fermentation over a long period

Most recipes involve adding boiling water to plant material. If this is the case, the large fermentation bucket should be clean but need not be sterilised. For cold processes it must be. Follow the given recipe to make your 'must', the sweet, yeasted extract of vegetable material. Once this is cool and starting to ferment, you must sterilise your equipment, so mix up your agent and use it to rinse out the siphon tube and airlocks, saving the solution in a jug until you have finished the winemaking session, in case you need it again.

Now place a demijohn on the floor below the table where the bucket rests, and transfer the must to it, using the siphon tube. To do this you submerge one end of the tube in the bucket, crouch down, and suck on the tube until the liquid reaches your mouth. At that moment, pull it from your mouth and slap

your thumb over the end. Be sure to keep it below the level of the bucket, or you will break the slight vacuum you have created, until you can release it into the mouth of the demijohn. Fill this bottle until the point at which it starts to narrow, then transfer the tube to another prepared demijohn, by sealing it with your thumb once again. The full demijohns must then have the airlocks fitted on them. Prepare each of them by soaking its cork in sterilising fluid, then put enough of this fluid into the lock itself to half fill the two chambers. Fit tightly to the top of the demijohn to make sure gas cannot escape, and air cannot invade, round the edges of the cork.

When fermentation of the wine ceases – which may take weeks or months, depending on the ambient temperature and the nature of the wine – bottle it using the siphon tube, again making sure to sterilise all the equipment. Cork firmly and leave for the prescribed number of months (though you will get a taste as you siphon). Some wines are not good at this stage, others, like the spiced elderberry, can already be palatable.

Recipes

BIRCH SAP WINE

4 litres/7 pints birch sap

2 lemons (zest and juice)

2 oranges (zest and juice)

225g/8oz raisins (chopped)

1.35kg/3lb sugar

Yeast

Peel the zest from the fruit and simmer it with the sap for twenty minutes in a covered pan. Put the sugar and raisins in a fermenting bucket and pour on the hot liquid, stirring to dissolve the sugar. When cool, add the fruit juice and the yeast, prepared as directed on its packet. Cover the bucket and leave in a warm place for the fermentation to start. Proceed as for the general winemaking method. Once bottled, leave to mature for at least a year.

BRAMBLE WINE

2.8kg/6lb brambles

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

1.8kg/4lb sugar

Yeast

Smash the fruit with a potato masher and pour on boiling water. Cover and leave to stand for two days, stirring from time to time. Strain through cloth, remove some of the liquid and add it to the sugar in a saucepan. Heat and stir until all the sugar is dissolved, then return it to the fermenting vessel. Test the temperature, and
when cooled to blood heat (this may be immediately), add the

yeast. Then proceed according to the general method.

DANDELION WINE

1.8 litres/4 pints dandelion heads

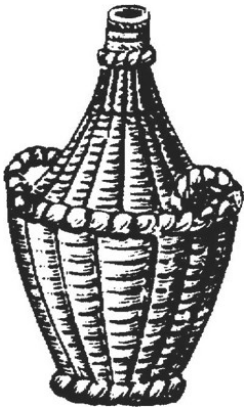
4 oranges (zest and juice)

1.35kg/3lb white sugar

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

Yeast

Measure the yellow heads, removing the green sepals first. Pour the boiling water over the flowers and leave for two days. Strain into a pan, add the grated zest of the oranges, and boil for ten minutes. Using a fermenting bucket, strain on to the sugar and stir until it dissolves. When cool, add the fruit juice and the yeast. Proceed by following the general method.



SPICED ELDERBERRY WINE

1.8kg/4lb elderberries

1.35kg/3lb demerara sugar

5g/0.25oz cloves

1 stick cinnamon

10g/0.5oz root ginger

1 lemon (zest and juice)

Yeast

4.5 litres/1 gallon boiling water

225g/8oz chopped raisins

Pull fruit from the stalks, then weigh them. Mash in a bowl, using your hands or a wooden spoon and pour on boiling water. Leave for two days, stirring from time to time, and then strain through muslin. Put the spices and grated lemon zest in a muslin bag, place in a pan with a pint or two of the juice and boil for twenty minutes. Allow this to cool, then wring out the bag and add the liquid to the main volume of the juice. Dissolve the sugar in the juice, then add the yeast, the chopped raisins and the lemon juice. Continue as for the general method of winemaking.

ELDERFLOWER WINE

Elderflowers

1.35kg/3lb sugar

4.5 litres/1 gallon boiling water

Yeast

2 lemons (zest and juice)

On a fine day gather the flower heads when in full bloom and full sun. Shake the florets into a bowl, using a fork to remove those reluctant to leave the stems, until you have a pint jug full of pressed-down flowers. Return these to the bowl and add the grated zest of the lemon and the sugar. Pour in the boiling water, stirring until all the sugar is dissolved. Cover and leave to cool. Once cooled, add the juice of the lemons and the yeast. Then follow the general method.

GORSE WINE

1.8 litres/3 pints gorse flowers, picked on a sunny day

1kg/2.2lb sugar

2 lemons

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

Simmer the flowers in the water for fifteen minutes, then add the sugar and stir until it is all dissolved. Strain into a bucket, add the lemon juice, and transfer to a sterilised demijohn according to the general method.

HAWTHORN BLOSSOM WINE

1 generous litre/2 pints hawthorn flowers

1.35kg/3lb sugar

2 lemons (zest and juice)

4.5 litres/1 gallon water

Yeast

Boil the grated zest of the lemons with the sugar in the water for fifteen minutes. Allow to cool a little, then pour over the flower heads in a fermenting bucket. Add the lemon juice, cover and leave overnight. Separate the must from the flower heads by straining or siphoning carefully, before putting the must into demijohns. Proceed by following the general method.

CORDIALS

Although they can be delicious, cordials rely on a large volume of sugar – as much as jam! If this is of concern to you, consider making a 'rob', which is a concentrated juice without added sugar (see the recipe for elder rob given on p176 in A Medicine Chest from the Wild). There are two general ways of preparing fruit cordials: a hot method and a cold method.

Hot method

1 Extract the juice from the fruits by gently simmering them with a little water. Softer fruits such as raspberries and brambles are better heated in a basin over a saucepan of boiling water.

2 Strain and wring out every drop of the juice on to the sugar at the rate of 570ml/1 pint to 450g/1lb of sugar and stir until all is dissolved.

3 Either bag the cooled cordial and freeze in convenient quantities for diluting in a jug later, or bottle it. Remember to label the bags.

4 For bottling you need small, clean, screw-topped bottles. Fill them to the point where the neck starts to narrow. Sterilise the lids by submerging them in boiling water, then place them loosely on the bottles. Put the bottles on a false bottom of a large saucepan (a pressure cooker with its loose tray is ideal for this), and pour in sufficient hot water from the kettle to come well up the sides of the bottles. Heat the water to
simmering point and maintain at this level for twenty minutes. Then put on your oven gloves and remove the bottles with care, screw down the lids firmly and leave them to cool on a chopping board. Label and date the bottles and store them in a cool, dark place.

Cold method

This is more difficult to store, so it does best if frozen rather than bottled. The advantage of the cold method is a fresher tasting drink.

1 Crush the fruit in a bucket, using a wooden spoon or potato masher, cover and leave in a warm room for a few hours.

2 In the meantime, make a syrup by boiling sugar at the rate of 450g/1lb to 570ml/1 pint of water (for smaller quantities, follow the individual recipe).

3 As soon as a gentle fermentation starts in the fruit mixture (gas bubbles will appear), run the juice through a scalded jelly bag or cloth, wring it out, and add it to the syrup.

4 Mix the juice and the syrup whilst the latter is hot in a 1:1 ratio. Add lemon juice or citric acid if the flavour is too bland.

Recipes

BRAMBLE CORDIAL

This recipe uses the 'hot method' described above.

2.7kg/6lb brambles

1.7 litres/3 pints water

10g/0.5oz cloves wrapped in muslin

2 lemons (juice only)

Simmer the brambles with the water and the cloves in a double saucepan, very gently, for an hour. Strain, add the juice of two lemons and, whilst still hot, mix with sugar in the ratio prescribed above.

ELDERFLOWER CORDIAL

40 heads of elderflower

1.8kg/4lb sugar

65g/2.75oz citric acid

2 lemons

1 litre/2 generous pints water

On a sunny day gather about forty large heads of elderflowers. Pull and shake the florets off into a large bowl. Place sugar in a large pan with the water and bring gently to the boil, stirring until all the sugar has dissolved. Pour this hot syrup carefully over the elderflowers and stir in the citric acid and grated lemon zest. Lastly add the juice of the lemons. Cover and leave for twenty-four hours. Strain through a double layer of cloth and pour into sterilised bottles. Sterilise the corks and seal. Store in a dark place. Alternatively, pour cordial into small freezer bags and store in the freezer, which is a more reliable method of keeping it fresh for many months.

ROSE HIP SYRUP

William Milliken

900g/2lb rose hips

450g/1lb sugar

1.7 litres/3 pints boiling water

Mince the fresh rose hips in a coarse mincer or food processor (don't worry too much about little bits of stalk), and drop into the boiling water. Bring it back to the boil and then leave to soak for fifteen minutes. Strain through a jelly bag (the fine mesh is important for filtering out the irritant hairs). Return the solids to the pan and add another 800ml/1.25 pints of boiling water. Stir,
allow it to stand for ten minutes, then strain again and add the fluid to the first batch. Add the sugar to the resulting fluid, stir well and bring to the boil for five minutes. Then pour into hot sterilised bottles and seal. Store in a dark place.

SEA BUCKTHORN AND ELDERFLOWER CORDIAL

Brenda Anderson

Despite having excellent antioxidant properties, sea buckthorn is often overlooked as a cordial ingredient, mainly due to its astringency. However, when combined with elderflowers, it creates a tasty, refreshing drink that is particularly rich in vitamins C and E. As is the case with many cordials, this one can be used as a base for sorbets, in a vinaigrette or as a marinade for all white meat dishes (see p101 in Fruits and Nuts).

25 large elderflower heads (freshly picked)

2.7kg/6lb sugar

2.2 litres/4 pints water

3 lemons (peel only)

225g/8oz sea buckthorn berries (picked in autumn and frozen)

Place the flower heads into a bowl along with the lemon zest. Put the sugar, water and sea buckthorn berries into a large pan and bring to the boil. Once the mixture has turned into a syrup, pour it over the flower heads and stir for a couple of minutes. Cover over with a clean cloth and leave for twenty-four hours to infuse. Sieve the cordial through a muslin-lined strainer and pour into sterilised glass bottles. Store in a cool place. To serve, dilute with sparkling water or wine.

SPRING GORSE CORDIAL

Brenda Anderson

Although this cordial can be made in all seasons, it is best when using spring or even summer gorse flowers. This recipe makes approximately 850ml/1.5 pints of cordial.

450g/1lb gorse flowers

450g/1lb sugar

1.1 litres/2 pints water

1 lemon, 1 lime and 1 orange (zest of orange only)

Make a simple stock syrup by boiling the water and sugar for

five to ten minutes. Add the zest and juice of the citrus fruits and the gorse flowers. Leave to soak overnight (or at very least until absolutely cool). Pass through a strainer with a muslin and bottle in sterilised bottles. Once opened, store in the fridge.

SPRUCE SYRUP

570ml/1 pint water

450g/1lb sugar

570ml/1 pint spruce shoots

½ lemon (juice only)

Soak fresh young spruce shoots in water overnight. Drain, keeping both the liquid and the shoots. Add the sugar to the liquid in a saucepan over heat, and stir until dissolved. Boil for ten minutes, or longer to make a thicker syrup. Remove from heat, add lemon juice and the spruce tips. Stir, cover and leave overnight. Taste in the morning. If you want even more spruce flavour, leave shoots in the syrup longer. Otherwise strain and bottle in sterilised bottles.

WILD RASPBERRY CORDIAL

This recipe uses the ‘cold method’ described above.

550g/1.25lb wild raspberries

350g/12oz sugar

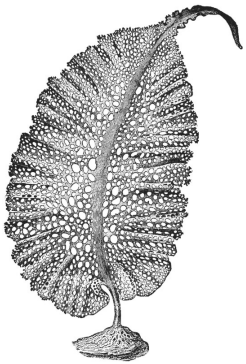
1 lemon

425ml/0.75 pint water

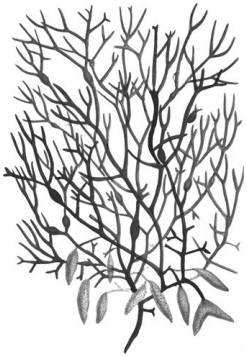
Extract the juice by bruising the berries and add the lemon juice. Make the syrup using the water and sugar. Follow the ‘cold method’ above. This is so delicious that you are unlikely to store any of it!

Fi Martynoga

CHAPTER SEVEN



SEAWEEDS



To some, seaweed is synonymous with the Japanese culture and sushi bars, for others it is something slippery and slimy that you slip on when walking along the beach. However, there is evidence that times are changing. Native seaweeds are making a comeback as food enthusiasts and the chef-world embrace this extraordinary 'superfood', which has enormous potential as an ingredient, flavouring, and seasoning agent. There is a demand for marsh-reared animals, acknowledged as having more flavour; similarly, seaweed can give food an extra layer of taste. Not only does it pack a nutritional punch, but with its low sodium profile, it is a healthy way to take in salt.

In the twenty-first century, seaweed is firmly on the agenda of research councils for analysis as a food for the future. There is a growing industry in the Hebrides where *Ascophyllum* is harvested and turned into animal feed, fertiliser and nutritional supplements. Seaweed is increasingly used as a key ingredient in beauty products (face creams, wraps, bath soaks). The UK and Ireland are co-funding 'BioMara', a six-million-euro project that is examining the feasibility and viability of producing biofuel from *Laminaria*. The area

likely to see the biggest growth in the next decade or so is that of small producers selling dried and fresh seaweed into the luxury end of the food market. There is already a taste for it in Scandinavia, northern Spain, France and the US. No longer is it a folksy product: it is now big business.

Seaweed yesterday and today

Early history

Seaweed has formed a part of the diet of Irish and Scottish coastal dwellers for at least 4,000 years, and as long ago as 15,000 years in some parts of the globe. The earliest recorded account of its use is in a poem dated around AD563 and attributed to St Columba, after his move from Donegal to Iona in the west of Scotland. St Columba describes the ideal life of the ascetic monk and talks of him 'cropping dulse from the rock'. The monks on Iona collected it for food for themselves and for the poor. Celtic historian Fergus Kelly has evidence that the presence of a dulse-rich rock on the shore of a farm increased its value by one cow!

A valuable food source

Seaweed continued to have associations with poverty, as it supplemented the diet of Scottish crofters who had been cleared from the land and forced to coastal locations between 1790 and 1820, and in Ireland, where it also became part of the diet during the potato famine after 1846. Dulse, and carageen (a natural thickener for puddings), which is widely eaten in the Hebrides and coastal areas, continue to be harvested for food in small quantities in both Ireland and Scotland. Purple laver (*Porphyra umbilicalis*, or *nori* as it is

known in Japan), is a traditional component of Welsh laverbread (*bara lafwr* in the Welsh language), which is made by boiling the seaweed, mincing it, and rolling cakes of it in oatmeal before frying. It was particularly useful as a plant that could be harvested in the depths of winter, as it is packed full of minerals and offered a perfect dietary supplement. Sea lettuce or green laver (*Ulva lactuca*) was considered a slightly inferior version of *Porphyra*. Traditionally, on the eastern and northern coasts of Scotland, dulse has been roasted on embers, sprinkled with vinegar and eaten as a snack. There are still people who do this today. Up until the beginning of the Victorian era you could have bought *Alaria esculenta* or *Laminaria saccharina* (sugar wrack) from a street vendor in Leith.

Seaweed in agriculture

For many generations seaweed has played a key role as a fertiliser, since its high concentration of vitamins, minerals and trace elements helped put goodness back into the soil. In the Highlands and Western Isles storm-cast seaweed was routinely collected and composted for a few weeks, before being dug into wide trenches or 'lazy beds'. At one point, when coastal populations were high, this system was used on quite a large scale to grow root vegetables, mainly potatoes. It was said that a crofter with an adequate supply of seaweed would be able to grow two crops of oats in successive years in the same plot, without the need for rotation.

In the areas around Ayr and North Berwick the abundance of seaweed was a great bonus to the farmers. Seaweed was considered a valuable resource for any farmer regardless of whether he lived in a croft north or south. There are records of civil cases brought against landowners who tried to prevent

people from gathering ‘sea ware’, an activity that was seen as a legitimate right.

Even as recently as the 1960s, a proposed seaweed processing plant in East Lothian had to be shelved as it would have used up all the seaweed the farmers needed. In the Hebrides, seaweed used to be collected as winter feed for cows, in order to keep the more valuable crops for humans or young livestock. Seaweed was often stored in the front portion of the porch in the island ‘black houses’. The fuci, or pods, of brown seaweeds such as *Ascophyllum nodosum*, or knotted wrack, were sometimes boiled with oatmeal, hay, chaff or oat husks, as a winter fodder. In the area around Loch Feochan seaweed used to be fed to pigs or calves, raw or boiled with oatmeal, particularly when they were being fattened for market.

Seaweed industry

From the latter part of the seventeenth century seaweed was found to have a number of industrial uses. Kelp ash contains soda and potash and was used initially in glazing and glass-making and later on in soap-making. Many shore kilns or stone-lined pits were established along the Scottish and Irish coasts. Seaweed
could be burnt in dry weather as soon as two days after collection: twenty tonnes of kelp yielded one tonne of ash. During the boom it is estimated that the Western Isles seaweed industry was supporting as many as 4,000 people. When the price of kelp ash collapsed after the removal of import duty in 1820, burning was over and its collapse contributed to Highland poverty and the misery of the clearances. At this point iodine extraction from seaweed began and lasted for a little over a hundred years, although it was never as significant as the kelp industry at is height.

Since the 1960s, agar, a derivative of seaweed, has been a key additive in the food industry, not for taste (it is a neutral-tasting jelly) but as a texturising, stabilising agent and thickener in ice cream, sherbets, jellies, soups, sauces, canned soups, and canned meat and fish, to name but a few.

Harvesting seaweed

Here's a list of helpful tips to remember if you want to gather seaweed safely and responsibly:

- Check what stage of the season you are picking. The nutritional value changes according to how young the plant is.
- Wear non-slip footwear and bring a knife or scissors and a basket or bag.
- Make sure the beach is clean and that there are no effluent outflow pipes where you are searching. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) website can tell you how clean the water is in different areas. See www.sepa. org.uk/water/bathing_waters/ bathing_water_profiles.aspx for more information.
- Check www.tidetimes.org.uk to make sure that you have enough time to collect seaweed. Arrive one hour before the lowest point of the tide and don't stay far out for more than one hour. Don't turn your back on the tide coming in.
- Never pick more than you need for personal consumption.
- Cut the upper third to two-thirds of your selected fronds carefully with a sharp blade. Make sure that the stipe (lowest and thinnest bit of stem) and holdfast (where stem is attached) remain undisturbed.

❊ You need a licence if you want to pick commercially.

In order to prepare seaweed for food use, follow these simple instructions:

1 Rinse in a bucket of fresh water or sea water to remove any small barnacles and sea creatures. Seaweed preserves better with natural salt on it.

2 To dry seaweed, lay it on a tray and place in a cool oven (40˚C/105˚F) overnight. Alternatively, put it in a hot oven and check it frequently. Remove from the oven when it crumbles easily (nori crisps faster than *Alaria*, dulse or sea spaghetti).

3 When dry, and crumbling easily, store in sealed bags or jars in a cool, dark place.

4 Grind in a coffee grinder or crush with pestle and mortar for easy storage.

BROWN SEAWEEDS (KELPS)

Kelp seaweeds are found in the deep water and are best picked at the lowest tides. Kelp seaweeds contain more vitamins, minerals and trace elements than any other food on earth and are an excellent mineral supplement. They are high in soluble fibre and in iodine, which helps thyroid function, and fertility.

DABBERLOCKS
Alaria esculenta

This seaweed is variously known as henware, murlin, tangle or wakame. It is dark brown or green, and can be up to two metres long. It has a central well-defined midrib running through it, and small wing-like leaves growing at the base. *Alaria* grows in clumps and is often partially submerged as it is typically found in subtidal areas at the low water mark. The best time to pick it is from mid-spring in to early summer.

In Japan this seaweed is eaten in miso soup, and it has a mild, sweet, juicy midribs taste, a bit like radish tops. It is high in

vitamin C and calcium.

KOMBU
Laminaria digitata

Also known as oarweed, sea tangle or sea ribbon, this seaweed is mid- to dark brown and has long, leathery straps. It looks like a giant palm, with finger-like fronds. Kombu is found in sub-tidal areas at the low water mark or lowest part of the shore, but it also grows further out to sea in clumps, usually partially submerged. Large, shiny, brown fronds move with the waves. It can be picked all the year round at low water during the spring tides that occur around the full and new moon each month, when tidal variation is at its greatest.

In Japan this seaweed is the basis of dashi stock, which goes into miso soup. It is surprisingly smooth and sweet, so is good in salads, soups, smoothies. Kombu is a natural MSG – it is an excellent source of an amino acid and glutamic acid, which acts as a natural flavour enhancer. It is a great source of energy, being high in naturally occurring sugars, potassium and sodium – in just the right proportions for healthy cell function. There is more fibre per 100g of kombu than in prunes, brown rice or porridge. It is also rich in iodine, so the Japanese, who eat a lot of kombu, eat fifty times more iodine than their American counterparts.

SEA SPAGHETTI
Himanthalia elongata

Given the name, you will be unsurprised to learn that this seaweed has long, spaghetti-like fronds, which grow from small, yellow-brown ‘buttons’. Its other names include thong

weed, button weed, sea haricots and sea thong. It inhabits the lower shore and rock pools, and it hangs down in a tangled mass from rocks when the tide is out and floats when the tide is in. You can pick it from early spring (let's say St Patrick's Day) to autumn, and you should take a few fronds from each button.

Sea spaghetti is high in calcium and magnesium and tastes rather like salty pasta. It can be marinaded and candied in sweet dishes, eaten savoury with fish and seafood, or mixed in with 'land' spaghetti. The button-like bases of the leaf-blade of this plant were used as an ingredient in a sauce served with poultry.

SUGAR WRACK
Saccharina latissima

Sugar wrack's other names include sugar kelp, poor man's weather glass, sea belt and, confusingly, it is sometimes called kombu. The single frond can be two to four metres in length and it has a bubbly, blistery appearance and crinkly edges, rather like a large, wavy tongue. It grows in gullies and rock pools in the low sub-tidal zone, and you can pick it from spring to summer in deep water by cutting three-quarters of the way down the blade.

This seaweed tastes sweet, salty and meaty: when roasted, it tastes like bacon. It can be used with chips, salads, soups, stews or stir-fries, though it can also be dried and powdered. Sugar wrack is particularly rich in calcium, iodine and magnesium.

RED SEAWEEDS

Red seaweeds are found between the low inter-tidal zone and deep water. Their distinctive colour pigment is able to absorb the limited sun rays that are able to penetrate at this depth. Red marine algae are powerful antiviral agents. Red seaweeds are primarily composed of carbohydrates and give you energy. They are also rich in iron.

CARAGEEN
Chondrus crispus

Also known as Irish moss, Dorset moss, Iberian moss, carageen moss, pearl moss or jelly moss, this pink to dark red seaweed is fan-shaped, with small, spiked fronds leading off each spoke. You can pick it from March to October on rocky shores at low tide, on middle or lower shores, and in and around rock pools. It is often found growing beneath kelp.

Carageen is gelatinous, with a salt kick and it is surprisingly comforting when eaten in milk pudding with strawberry jam. Use it to make creamy puddings, milkshakes, jelly, ice creams, panna cotta, mousses or roulades: it is nature's gelatine. It is rich in antioxidants and also good for your gut

and, as it's gentle on the stomach, was given in the Victorian nursery to ailing children or used as a classic food for recuperating invalids.

DULSE
Palmaria palmata

Sometimes called dillisk, or *creathnach* in Ireland, dulse is a dark, brownish-red with purple tones. It varies in shape and size from a single, broad blade to a narrow one. It has rounded ends, and is delicate and thin, and is most commonly seen growing in several segments. Dulse grows from a single holdfast on its own in small clumps in rocks, or in the sand from the rocky midshore and down to the low tide mark, where it grows on the stems of larger kelps and oarweeds. You can pick it between May and October.

With its smoky, meaty taste and deep, rich, purple-red colour, Dulse is robust enough to use with anything from fish to mutton; it has been used with wild fowl since as far back as the fifth century. It was traditionally eaten with oatmeal in a thick broth or served boiled and tossed in butter. Dulse soda bread is popular in Ireland, whilst Michelin chef Aggi Sverrisson confessed recently that he sprinkles dried ground dulse on all his white fish and in most of the desserts he cooks. It is surprisingly sweet in ice cream. There is more iron in an 8g serving of dulse than in 100g of raw sirloin. It contains ten to fifty times more iron than spinach and between three and ten times more than liver. Traditionally it was also used in various folk remedies, such as 'sticking plaster' or poultice substitutes.

NORI

Porphyra umbilicalis

Nori grows on rocks or boulders on middle or lower shores, and is variably called slake, sloke, slacan, black butter, purple sea vegetable laver, karango or sea leaf. Frankly it looks like a melted bin liner on a rock! It is a small seaweed, almost translucent, dark purple to red, or green to chocolate black when it is ready to harvest. It can grow as a single sheet or in separate strands. It can be picked from the first frost through to April, but you should only take a little from each rock so it can regenerate.

The texture is like cooked cabbage, but it has a mild, savoury taste, slightly like olives. It can be eaten raw or cooked, chopped into salads, stews, rice, noodles dishes, gravies, soups or incorporated into sweet sponge puddings, chocolate gateaux, cakes and biscuits. Nori has the highest protein content of all the seaweeds and is high in beta-carotene and vitamins B12 and C, amongst others. It contains lignan compounds, which are antioxidants that may prevent and help fight cancer.

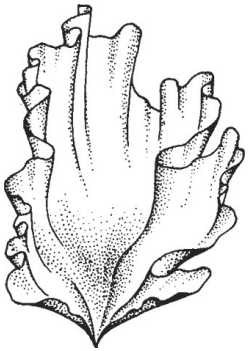
PEPPER DULSE

Osmundea pinnatifida

With small, flat, purplish-brown to black fronds, pepper dulse can grow to 20cm, but it is commonly low growing where it is exposed to light. It inhabits the mid inter-tidal zone, on rocky ground where mussels grow, and can be picked from spring to early summer.

Pepper dulse is savoury, like garlic or pepper, and can be used as a condiment to flavour egg dishes, fish and shellfish, or it can be mixed into sour cream as an accompaniment to

smoked fish. Its health benefits derive from the fact that it is a powerful antiviral agent.



GREEN SEAWEEDS

Growing in the warm and shallow waters of the upper inter-tidal zone, these seaweeds most closely resemble land plants because of their distinctive colour, which comes from the cholorophyll pigment. These are the easiest of the sea vegetables to find and, like the red varieties, green seaweeds are mostly made up of energy-giving carbohydrates, and are rich in iron.

GUTWEED
Enteromorpha intestinalis

This transparent, pale green plant has fronds that are crinkled and tubular. Also known as *Ulva compressa*, it grows on rocky shores up to the high tide mark as it favours a reduced salinity. You can pick it all year round, though it's best in spring and summer, and you can harvest from rock pools, where it grows on stones or shells. Gently pull the seaweed off (as you would with nori) and make sure to only take what you need.

Gutweed tastes similar to sea lettuce and is particularly rich in iron and magnesium. It is great as a seasoning and retains its bright green colour when flaked into risottos, soups, fish and shellfish dishes.

SEA LETTUCE
Ulva lactuca

Sometimes simply called lettuce, this seaweed also goes by the aliases of chicory and green laver. It is pale green when young and darker green when old, and grows in sheltered spots such as rock pools at the middle and lower tidal zones. It can be picked at most times of the year, though July and August is usually best. Simply cut the upper two thirds of the plant with a knife or scissors.

Sea lettuce has a crisp iodine taste: think of it as a parsley or chive substitute with a saline punch that makes it an incredible addition to any dish. Try seaweed tartare, for instance, or use it dried as seasoning for seafood, or crumbled over risottos, soups, or fish stews. It can also be used as a wrap for kebabs and fish. With the most iron of all the seaweeds, it contains roughly twenty times the iron of beef, and much more than liver or spinach. It is rich in protein, calcium, manganese, potassium, silica, and vitamins A, B and C. An 8g serving of sea lettuce provides 37% of the recommended daily intake of calcium for an adult male, whilst the same serving of cheddar cheese only provides 5%. Sea lettuce is particularly high in vitamin B12: one serving provides all your daily recommended intake.

Xa Milne and Fiona Houston

CHAPTER EIGHT

A MEDICINE CHEST FROM THE WILD

This chapter is a brief guide to some of the more common plants you might consider gathering as remedies for yourself and your family. Please note that herbal remedies should not be used as a replacement for conventional medicine. Always consult your doctor about the appropriate treatments for any medical conditions.

Many herbs with healing properties may be found growing wild in Scotland, and below are a few of the most popular and how to prepare them.

Make sure you can properly identify the herbs you intend to harvest. I recommend getting at least two different wildflower books: one with photographic images and one with drawings. Make sure to read the information on leaf shape, height and likely habitat, as often the pictures concentrate on the flower and you will need more than that to fully identify the plant. Also look out for local herbalists leading 'herb walks'.

Guidelines on harvesting

First of all you should always seek the permission of the landowner before harvesting any herb, especially roots, as it is illegal to dig up wild plants.

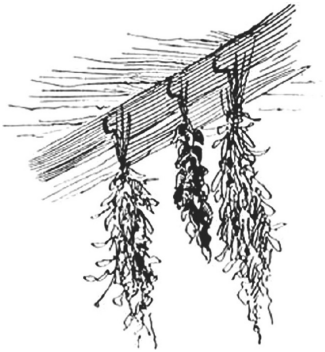
Then you should take care to harvest sustainably:

- If you are harvesting roots, make sure to take only as much as you need and never more than 10% of the population where you are harvesting; less if you think others will harvest there, too.
- If you are harvesting flowers or aerial parts of annual plants, make sure there are plenty left to self-seed for next year.

- Even if it is ‘only’ leaves you want, make sure that you don’t strip the plants bare as that will kill them since they won’t be able to photosynthesise.

Thirdly think about where the plants are growing – those by roadsides and fields may have been sprayed with pesticides or fertiliser and should be left well alone as they may well contain chemicals different to the natural plant constituents that give them their healing properties.

Finally never harvest aerial parts (flowers, leaves, stems) that are still damp with dew or rain as they will start to rot before you get them home. The best time to harvest is at the start of a fine, sunny day with a light breeze just after the dew has dried off the plants – if this follows a rainy day so much the better as the plants will be fresh and clean. It should not be necessary to wash flowers, leaves or stems harvested at the right time and washing may leach out some of the therapeutic phytochemicals you want. Roots are a little easier and the best season to harvest most roots is after the aerial parts have died back in autumn or before they start to shoot again in spring. If you can find a time when the ground is dry but not frozen, the roots will come out cleaner and need less washing. However, most roots will need a little wash to get the mud off – don’t soak them but wash each one separately, preferably under running water. I find an old toothbrush sterilised in alcohol or bleach is useful to scrub roots clean.



Preserving and using

There are three main ways to preserve the herbs you harvest for use throughout the year: drying, infusing in oil, or making an alcohol tincture.

The simplest is drying them. Lay the herbs flat and well separated on a sheet of paper in a dark, airy, dust-free place – a
floored loft space can be ideal or a large airing cupboard. Some herbs can be hung in bunches to dry if your ceilings are high enough to avoid them rubbing on people's heads as they pass! Don't hang them in steamy areas like in a kitchen or bathroom. Check drying herbs regularly and once they are dry, break them up and store in paper bags or dark glass jars labelled with contents and date. Unless you have a specialised food dryer, I don't advocate using artificial heat to dry herbs as you may just end up with cooked herbs, their goodness destroyed. Most roots should be chopped or sliced before drying as dry roots can become too hard to use. Dried herbs can be infused in boiling water for five to ten minutes (usually one teaspoon per cup) or decocted (simmered in a pan) for a little longer (better for roots, seeds and woody

herbs). In either case keep lidded until ready to drink in order to preserve any volatile components.

A good way to preserve herbs for external use is to infuse them in a good quality vegetable oil – whatever your preference is between sunflower, olive, sweet almond oil, etc. For this you will need to pack the chopped, slightly wilted herbs (if you leave them for between twelve and twenty-four hours after picking you will avoid excess water) into a glass jar and cover with your chosen oil, then lid firmly and place the jar in a pan of cold water up to the level of the oil. Bring water to a gentle boil and simmer for two to four hours, then strain off the oil through a coffee filter or fine muslin – DO NOT squeeze or you will end up with water in the oil, which will then go off rapidly. For really good results infuse a second batch of herbs in the same oil. The resulting oil should be well labelled, including the 'best before' date of the original vegetable oil. Infused oils are used externally to massage joints or for skin problems and may be made into ointments by melting a little beeswax into them (usually about 10% by weight).

For longevity it is hard to beat an alcohol tincture for ensuring you have your favourite herbs available whenever you need them. A fresh herb tincture must be made with alcohol of at least 25% strength for its preservative properties, and for small (non-commercial) quantities you will usually need 5ml of alcohol for every 1g of herb. For example if you want to make a tincture of
100g of fresh yarrow, first chop the yarrow into 1–2cm pieces with knife, scissors or secateurs and place in a wide-necked, lidded container, preferably glass (preserving jars are ideal), which will hold well over 500ml. Then take your alcohol –

for this example, suppose it is 40% vodka, which means that for every 100ml you have 40ml of pure alcohol and 60ml of water. We want 500ml of 25% alcohol – 125ml of alcohol and 375ml of water – so you need 312.5ml of vodka (125×100/40). This gives you 125ml of alcohol and 187.5ml of water, so we need to add another 187.5ml of plain water to get the required 375ml. Mix the vodka and water in a jug, then pour over the herb, making sure it is all covered. Now store the jar in a dark place, shake it daily for a fortnight, then strain off the liquid through fine muslin or a coffee filter (or press it out with a wine press). This is your tincture and it should be bottled in a dark glass bottle and well labelled, including date – e.g. 'Yarrow tincture 1:5 25% 8th August 2012'. Most herbs described in this chapter use 25% alcohol to make tinctures, but a few need up to 35% or 45%, and these are noted.

Other ways of preserving herbs include freezing them, juicing then freezing, infusing in vegetable glycerine (similar method to tinctures but don't dilute the glycerine when using fresh herbs), making syrups, 'robs' (syrups made by boiling down the juice) and reduced decoctions. Henriette Kress's *Practical Herbs* is one of the few books still in print with more details on making herbal medicines.

DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale

These cheerful, deep yellow, compound flowers and the resulting globe-shaped seed heads are beloved of children, who like to see how many puffs it takes to blow the 'clock' away. Dandelions grow on single, hollow stalks with all the leaves at the base. The spear-shaped leaves vary from almost smooth-edged to deeply indented and there is a substantial tap root beneath. Dandelions grow almost anywhere except deep shade, and they flower from spring through to late autumn.

Harvest the leaves when clean, dry and not too old and tough. Harvest the roots in autumn or winter – you will find this easiest where the dandelions are growing in deep, fertile ground as getting them out of stony tracks and paths is very hard work and the yields are low. Clean the roots and cut into small pieces while still fresh as once dried they set like concrete and are nigh on impossible to chop. For tincture making, fresh roots can be chopped in a food processor, but the resulting pieces are too small for drying.

Dandelion leaves are a very effective diuretic and are rich in potassium – one of the unwanted side effects of most diuretic drugs is potassium depletion, which does not happen with dandelion leaf. It is best taken as an infusion for water retention and swollen legs; but do so in the mornings, not for nothing is the plant known as *pissenlit* (wet the bed) in France!

The roots are bitter and, as such, stimulate the liver and gall bladder to release the bile and enzymes needed for proper

digestion and/or to overcome constipation. It can even help to balance blood sugar levels in those prone to carbohydrate cravings. Dried root pieces can be roasted lightly in a medium oven, then decocted to make a very palatable, caffeine-free alternative to coffee.

When making a tincture of the roots (25% alcohol) you may see a whitish deposit forming. This is inulin, a compound that has been credited with enhancing the immune system, so shake the container well to make sure it is incorporated in the tincture.

Another yellow flower in the daisy family, elecampane (*Inula helenium*), also produces large quantities of inulin when root tinctures are prepared and thus needs to be shaken regularly in storage, too. It also aids digestion but is best known for treating lung complaints such as bronchitis.

Tinctures of bitter plants such as dandelion are best taken a few minutes before meals to prepare the digestion.

Young dandelion leaves make a useful salad leaf while the flowers can be used in country winemaking.

ELDER

Sambucus nigra

A very useful medicinal herb that is described in more detail in chapter two.

Elderflowers picked in early summer can be dried face down on paper (don't try hanging them, they'll drop petals everywhere) then stripped from the stalks with a fork to make infusions for hayfever or for washing irritated skin. They can also be infused in oil to make skin creams and lotions. You can also make ointment but a lighter preparation is better for inflamed or itchy skin conditions. Creams are made by combining oil-based and water- (or tincture-) based ingredients using an emulsifier. They are quite tricky to perfect so an easier method is to buy a simple base cream and add a little of the oils and infusions/tinctures of your choice. The flowers are also taken internally as an infusion or tincture for easing rough, reddened skin conditions or puffy skin and also mild fevers.

Research on elderberries has shown them to have antiiral activity against at least some strains of the influenza virus, which vindicates their traditional use for all kinds of colds and flu. They may be tinctured for this purpose (30–35% alcohol), but the traditional method is to make elderberry rob or syrup.

The rob is made by putting the berries (scraped off the stems using a fork) in a pan with just enough water to cover them. Bring to a gentle boil and simmer until the berries soften and release their juices. Strain off the berry skins, squeezing them

to get as much juice as possible, then return the liquid to a pan and simmer for a long period until the volume has reduced by at least 50%.

The syrup is made in a similar fashion but when the liquid is returned to the pan, sugar is added at a ratio of 1kg of sugar to each litre of juice. It is then heated gently until the sugar is fully dissolved. Sometimes cloves, ginger and cinnamon sticks are added during the initial stage to impart some additional flavour and benefit.

It is very important to sterilise bottles or jars to be used for robs and syrups as they make ideal mediums to grow bacteria!

MEADOWSWEET

Filipendula ulmaria

The candyfloss-like heads of tiny, cream flowers are a common sight around ditches and marshy areas, often among reeds or willows or other plants that love damp conditions. The leaves are compound, typically with five rough, mid-green leaflets.

Harvest upper parts when just in flower, on a dry day after the dew is off it. Avoid any mildewed or insect-infested plants. It is best dried in a warm, airy, dust-free environment, lying on sheets of paper since it will drop pollen and flowers if hung to dry. Ensure any drying plants are not lying on each other where they might rot. Once the leaves are crisp, chop and mix the flowers and leaves together and store in a paper bag or dark glass jar.

Make a strong infusion by pouring boiling water on one

tablespoonful of dried herb per pint in a covered teapot. The resulting ‘tea’ helps treat mild fevers, especially those accompanied by rheumatic-type aches and pains. The infusion or tincture (25% alcohol) is also very helpful for relieving the pain and swelling of both acute and chronic arthritis.

Although this plant was originally used to manufacture aspirin, its salicylates are balanced by tannins and mucilage, which makes it a real friend to the stomach, helping balance acid levels. The highly perfumed infusion makes a wonderful natural alternative to antacids for bloating, nausea, burping, reflux and appetite loss.

It also helps with bilious headaches, mucousy cystitis (and urinary urgency or dark urine) and uric acid build-up in joints (gout and other arthritic complaints). Given in small doses it is very comforting to young children with diarrhoea.

For bloating and reflux try an infusion or tincture of meadowsweet, yarrow and mint. Replace mint with rosemary if headaches are frequent or to help arthritic pain.

NETTLE

Urtica dioica

This extremely useful plant (see chapter two) also has a wide range of healing properties.

An infusion of nettle is rich in vitamins and minerals, especially iron. It can also aid the absorption of iron so it's often used in tonic formulae for anyone a little anaemic. Combined with elderflower and mint, nettle's antihistamine action can allay hayfever and other allergies. Nettle leaf is the most commonly used part of the plant and, as a tea or tincture (25% alcohol), it is said to cleanse the blood of impurities. When used in spring tonics, it helps improve the complexion, clear spots, make hair shinier and generally give a feeling of well-being. If constipation is a problem, it is often used in association with dandelion or curled dock root (*Rumex crispus*). A nettle leaf tincture or infusion combined with circulatory herbs such as yarrow or hawthorn often forms part of a recipe for arthritis and rheumatism (the Romans reputedly deliberately stung themselves with it for this purpose – and that can indeed be effective, if you can bear it).

Dried nettle leaf can be offered to horses to improve their coats, and to poultry for feather improvement. They usually love it.

Nettle seed decoction or tincture is a useful kidney tonic, helpful for those prone to kidney and urinary infections, whilst nettle root is used to reduce benign prostate hypertrophy (BPH),
which can lead to urinary problems in older men – for this

latter purpose nettle root can be usefully combined with the leaves of rosebay willowherb (*Epilobium angustifolium*), which should be harvested before flowering as the flowers will go to seed during drying and you end up with white fluff everywhere!

VALERIAN

Valeriana officinalis

Be aware that, in some parts of the country, garden valerian has escaped and become naturalised. However, unlike its wild cousin, garden valerian is no use medicinally.

Wild valerian prefers moist ground around ditches but can thrive even in quite dry conditions once established. It is perennial but dies back in winter. The light green stems and pairs of leaves with six to ten pairs of leaflets appear in spring and the flowers, on branching stems, around mid-June onwards. The flowers are compound with slightly domed irregular heads of creamy or pinkish white florets – sometimes purplish when they first appear. It doesn't have a tap root but rather a mass of shortish roots from which new

plants develop. The whole plant, but the roots in particular, have a strange smell that is easily recognised once learnt. The part used medicinally is the roots, usually as a tincture (45%) or as dried slices in a decoction. It can be very helpful for improving sleep but only a small dose
is required – too much can have the opposite effect. It is very calming for anxious or nervous types and was used to treat shell shock in the First World War. So successful was it that when the first anti-anxiety drug came on the market they called it Valium so that it sounded as if it was related to valerian, although it wasn't.

It is also good for those types of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) that grow worse with stress.

For those with feline companions, you will find that it is even more attractive than catnip, so any dried root needs to be stored well out of puss's reach!

For sleep problems it is often combined with other herbs such as vervain (*Verbena officinalis*), skullcap (*Scutellaria* species), field poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) or wild lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*), while for IBS it can be used in combination with digestive herbs like fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) or lovage (*Ligusticum* species). Scots lovage (*Ligusticum scoticum*) can be found in the wild but like all the umbellifers you must be very sure of its identification to avoid mistakes with the poisonous members for the family such as hemlock.

YARROW

Achillea millefolium

The flattish heads of small, white or pinkish flowers sit on upright stalks bearing feathery leaves. It thrives in dry, stony environments by tracks and paths, and does well in richer conditions, preferably exposed to full sun.

Flowers and clean leaves can be harvested at any time during the long, summer-into-autumn flowering period. Fresh or dried, they may be applied directly to open wounds or used to stop a nosebleed.

Drunk as a tea or tincture (see above), yarrow has a multitude of beneficial uses. It helps circulation both by improving venous return to prevent worsening varicose veins and by improving blood flow to extremities for Raynaud's syndrome. In some cases it helps reduce high blood pressure. Yarrow is also a very useful herb for 'female problems' since it aids circulation to the pelvic region, which helps alleviate painful periods. Its drying action can reduce over-heavy periods and also promotes better handling of hormones by the liver for other menstrual problems. This latter effect is due to its bitter taste, which stimulates the liver to both work more efficiently and produce bile to help digestion of fats, thus explaining its reputation for improving nausea, bloating and poor appetite. Yarrow decongests the upper respiratory organs during colds, flu and hayfever episodes, particularly when taken as a hot infusion.

A popular hayfever 'tea' contains yarrow, nettle, elderflower and mint. For menstrual problems try tinctures of yarrow,

lady's mantle and red clover or sage. Varicose veins may be helped by adding yarrow and horse chestnut tinctures to a base cream, whilst high blood pressure could be reduced by making a 'tea' with yarrow, limeflower and hawthorn flowers.

OTHER USEFUL HERBS

AGRIMONY
Agrimonia eupatoria

A tall, yellow-flowered plant with strawberry-like leaves that have rich, autumn colours during that season. The flowers are tiny and cluster in a long spike around the single stem from June to August.
Found at roadsides and on limestone, it nevertheless thrives in other soil types if introduced. It is chiefly used as an astringent for both internal bleeding and wounds but also bed-wetting and unstable bladder control. It is also a useful liver herb sometimes used for gallstones or mild jaundice – either as a tincture or tea of dried flowers and leaves.

BETONY
Stachys betonica

Betony has long, green stems rising from a rosette of rough, green leaves with toothed margins. The pink flowers, typical of the mint family, are born in a cluster at the top of the stem, sometimes with a smaller cluster a little below the main one. Found often at woodland edges and sometimes in meadows, the plant's flowers and leaves are used as a tea or tincture to treat headaches, especially those that feel like an embedded axe, and other nerve problems, including insomnia. Its bitterness can help with weak digestion.

BIRCH
Betula pendula

A familiar, slender tree often with silvery or shiny, purplish bark and small, heart-shaped leaves on very thin twigs. The leaves are harvested in spring and make a very pleasant tasting tincture, which is diuretic, anti-inflammatory and cleansing, used for cystitis but also gout and rheumatism. The sap is also sometimes tapped in spring to make birch wine with similar properties, and the bark can also be used like willow bark.

BLAEBERRY
Vaccinium myrtillus

A low-growing shrub of moorland areas, often found among heather. It has small, glossy, green leaves and bell-shaped

flowers that ripen to dark purple berries in high summer. The berries may be used fresh or frozen or tinctured (35%) to aid circulation, especially to the eyes, and it is credited with improving night vision. The leaves help balance blood sugar and with the berries help prevent the peripheral neuropathy of diabetes.

BURDOCK
Arctium lappa and A. minor

A rather statuesque biennial with large, soft, dull green leaves and small, reddish-purple compound flowers that quickly ripen to the distinctive spherical 'burrs' that give it its name and stick to any passing animal or human. Although the leaves and seeds can be used either dried or tinctured, it is more usually the root that is used medicinally, harvested at the end of the first year before the flowers and seeds develop. It is a mild, bitter liver herb that is particularly noted for clearing skin conditions, including acne, eczema and psoriasis, by helping blood toxins be eliminated via the liver and bowels rather than the skin.

CHICKWEED
Stellaria media

Familiar to most gardeners as the small creeping weed that invariably infests cultivated soil. With tiny white flowers and easily pulled out roots, harvesting the top part without mud from the roots can be tricky. It can be made into an infused oil and thence to a cream for applying to itchy and inflamed skin. The tincture or, better still, fresh juice can be drunk to treat all

kinds of hot, itchy conditions. It doesn't dry well and is best juiced, then frozen.

COLTSFOOT
Tussilago farfara

Flowers appear before the leaves, on distinctive scaly-looking stems, and are layered with sugar to make a cough syrup. The leaves are also used in infusions for spasmodic or dry coughs. Both are for short-term relief: avoid using coltsfoot over a longer period, or in tincture form, as it is theoretically possible to damage the liver.

GROUND IVY
Glechoma hederacea

This is no relation to ivy but rather a small, creeping member of the mint family with wavy-edged, roundish to kidney-shaped leaves and purple flowers. When crushed it does have a light aromatic scent. The dried (or fresh) aerial parts make a pleasant addition to herb teas (especially with other mints) or it may be tinctured as a mucous membrane tonic often used for persistent sinusitis, hayfever, blocked ears, hearing problems and even tinnitus.

GUELDER ROSE
Viburnum opulus

A common garden shrub, more likely naturalised than truly native. The lacy white flowers have flattish, compound heads and are followed by bright red berries, while the leaves are almost maple-like in shape and similarly colourful in autumn. The
medicinal part is the inner bark – taken from pruned branches about a finger thick, never from the main stem to avoid killing the shrub – and tinctured. It is renowned for easing spasmodic pain (it is also known as cramp bark) of all kinds and can also treat high blood pressure and some circulatory problems that are due to excessive tension in the blood vessel walls.

HAWTHORN
Crataegus species

A common hedgerow shrub with small, lobed leaves and white or pink flowers known as May blossom, although it is not usually seen in Scotland before June. These are followed by the ovoid red berries or haws in the autumn. Both flowering tips (with some leaf but not the woody stem) and

haws can be dried for infusions (flowers) or decoctions (berries) or tinctured (45% for berries) to treat certain heart problems. The flavonoids of the flowers and anthocyanidins of the berries are antioxidant and improve the flexibility of the circulatory system. Thus they can have a positive effect on both high and low blood pressure, as well as cold hands and feet and other signs of poor circulation. High blood pressure is dangerous so please consult a doctor or medical herbalist rather than self-treating.

HORSE CHESTNUT
Aesculus hippocastanum

A well-loved, large tree with familiar hand-shaped (five-lobed) leaves and knobbly, green fruits containing the shiny chestnuts
so beloved of children for playing ‘conkers’. These very chestnuts can be chopped up (fresh, not after the kids have had them!) and tinctured to treat varicose veins and heavy legs – both taken internally (in small doses for safety and never with blood thinners such as warfarin) and added to creams to stroke over the offending veins.

LIMEFLOWER
Tilia species

Any of the lime or linden trees can be used if they bear perfumed yellow flowers in high summer. The flowers make a lovely tea so are often dried but they can also be tinctured for their calming and relaxing effect. The flavonoids they contain also help clear congested arteries and lower blood pressure. The French apparently park the prams of fractious babies under flowering limes for the calming effect.

MUGWORT
Artemisia vulgaris

A tall relative of wormwood with deeply divided leaves, dark green on top and white-ish below, and tiny compound flower-heads that look like tiny, grey spheres while in bud, and open to a nondescript greyish yellow. It seems to thrive in neglected areas of our cities in cracks in the pavement or up against ruinous buildings and, as such, is often polluted by dog excrement and worse. However, if you can find a clean specimen, harvest the upper parts for drying or to tincture. Like its garden relative, it is a useful liver herb for stimulating bile flow, and for removing blood impurities and parasites. But it is perhaps best known for aiding female hormone balance, bringing on delayed menstruation and easing cramping with light flow, although it must not be taken during pregnancy. The dried herb has a reputation for driving away evil spirits or ‘bad’ energy if burnt in smudge sticks and wafted round the space to be cleared.

ST JOHN' S WORT
Hypericum perforatum

An upright herb whose stems are ringed by whorls of tiny leaves, which, if you hold them up to the light, can be seen to be perforated with tiny holes. It has yellow flowers for most of the summer.

Infusing the upper leaves and flowers in oil gives a fantastic, blood-red oil that can be used to treat cold sores (*Herpes simplex*) and also the painful rash of shingles (*Herpes zoster*). The tincture (or dried herb infusion) is perhaps best known for treating depression but is also a useful restorative to physically damaged nerves so can help with shooting pains, trembling and spasms. It also has a particular affinity for the urinary system and is sometimes used to help prevent bed-wetting.

SCOTS OR TUBEROUS COMFREY
Symphytum tuberosum

This comfrey is somewhat smaller than its English counterpart or the frequently escaped Russian or hybrid comfrey. The Scots comfrey has mid-green, soft leaves with prominent vein structure and slightly irritating hairs underneath. It bears creamy, bell-shaped flowers in the spring and prefers woodland or shady places. Scots comfrey is very useful for all kinds of connective tissue injuries, from blisters through to strains and sprains to fractures. If you injure yourself out walking and are fortunate enough to spot comfrey, pick a few leaves and bruise them by rolling

between the hands then apply to or wrap around injured area. If you have a bone fracture, you may speed up repair by drinking a tea of dried or fresh comfrey leaves (but it is no longer recommended for anything other than external use as it contains a carcinogen). This is very much a herb for acute cases and should not be used long term as there is a theoretical danger of liver damage if used for more than a month or two.

WILD ANGELICA
Angelica sylvestris and A. palustris

Closely related to the garden angelica, and these two wild species grow in woods and marshes respectively. Both are similar: statuesque biennials but less tall than the garden herb that can reach two metres in height. Their leaves are mid-green with five to seven leaflets and the umbels of white or pinkish flowers are almost spherical, ripening to large green, strongly aromatic seeds. Both root and seeds are used

medicinally but, as with all umbellifers, please be very careful with identification and in particular be sure that the plant you are picking is not hemlock water dropwort, or hemlock itself, both of which are very poisonous.

Dried and decocted or tinctured (45%) the seeds are very clearing, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory to the lungs and respiratory system, whilst the roots have similar properties for the stomach and intestines. Both are used for colds and phlegmy conditions and for stimulating poor appetite during convalescence and for the elderly.

WILLOW
Salix species

The tree from which salicylic acid (aspirin) was first isolated. There are many varieties of willow but pretty much all of them can have their inner bark harvested (as above) to make an anti-inflammatory, analgesic tincture, which is used in similar ways to
meadowsweet but, as it is much stronger in tannins and contains little mucilage, it is much less kind to the stomach and is not recommended for people with poor digestion.

WOOD AVENS
Geum urbanum

Wood avens is yellow-flowered and found mainly in woods. The leaves start as heart-shaped, but then divide into three or five lobes as they mature. The five-petalled flowers appear singly on the stems and mature to distinctive burr-like seed heads. Both aerial parts and roots are used as astringents, particularly for diarrhoea or IBS with urgency and loose stools.

YELLOW OR CURLED DOCK
Rumex crispus

Closely related to the more common broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) we use to ease nettle stings, but it tends to have narrower leaves with wavy margins, whilst its seeds have three parts to them and the root is noticeably yellowish. The root is used either decocted or tinctured to move the bowels and relieve constipation. Both yellow dock and burdock are frequently combined with dandelion root for

constipation, arthritis and skin problems.

And finally:

COUCH GRASS
Agropyron repens

The roots may be used as a decoction to soothe cystitis.

FEVERFEW AND COSTMARY
Tanacetum parthenium and T. balsamita

These are garden escapes and renowned for treating migraines – either by eating the fresh leaves or using the tincture (45%).

MULLEIN OR AARON' S ROD
Verbascum thapsus

The leaves and flowers are used in infusion or tinctures for a range of respiratory problems from coughs to sinusitis and the flowers can be infused in oil to treat earache and soften wax.

VIPER'S BUGLOSS
Echium vulgare

This has a blue flower and its leaves may be tinctured to

apply to bites and stings.

WILD RASPBERRY
Rubus idaeus

The leaf is astringent and used for toning the uterus in the last few weeks before birth and also for stopping diarrhoea.

Quick reference section by ailment

colds – angelica, elder, ground ivy, meadowsweet, rose hip, willow, wild thyme, yarrow

constipation – burdock, chickweed, dandelion, guelder rose, mugwort, nettle, valerian, yellow dock

coughs – coltsfoot, comfrey, elderberry, mullein

cystitis – agrimony, birch, couch grass, dandelion, horsetail

diarrhoea – agrimony, comfrey, valerian, wild raspberry, wood avens

flu-like symptoms – angelica, elderberry, meadowsweet, yarrow

hangover – agrimony, dandelion, mugwort, nettle, yellow dock

hayfever – elderflower, nettle, yarrow

headache – betony, dandelion, feverfew, hawthorn, meadowsweet, valerian, yarrow

insomnia – betony, hawthorn, limeflower, St John's wort, valerian

menstrual pain and PMT – guelder rose, meadowsweet, mugwort, yarrow

nausea – agrimony, dandelion, mugwort, wood avens

palpitations – hawthorn, limeflower, valerian

poor circulation and varicose veins – hawthorn, horse chestnut (externally), limeflower, nettle, yarrow

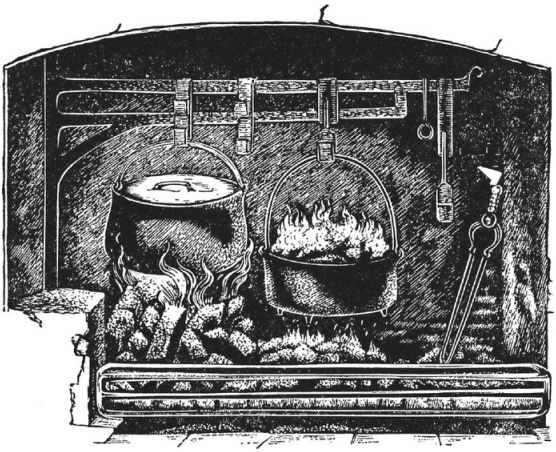
rashes and itchy skin – chickweed, comfrey, nettle (internally), St John's wort, viper's bugloss

sprains and strains – comfrey, willow

wounds – betony, chickweed, comfrey, St John's wort, yarrow

Erica Hollis

CHAPTER NINE



FIREWOOD

Wood is perhaps the most environmentally friendly way of heating your home. While it does produce more nitrous oxides and particulates than gas, and therefore is not always suitable in urban areas, these emissions can be minimised by burning dry wood in an efficient and well-maintained woodstove or boiler and by sourcing logs from nearby.

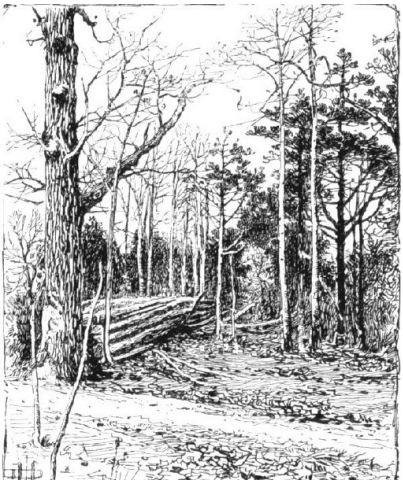
Gathering fallen branches can be good fun on a family outing. But it is unlikely that you could ever harvest enough in this manner to fuel anything more than a small woodstove used as an occasional room heater. If you want a sustainable wood supply to fuel a boiler or any type of stove that is fired regularly, you have to set about growing it for yourself, which requires land, or else accept that you need to order regularly from a good log merchant.

GROWING FIREWOOD

Wood is supposedly carbon-neutral, since growing trees absorb carbon dioxide, but this claim is undermined by industrial forestry, which produces greenhouse gases in ground preparation, planting, fencing, chemicals, harvesting and transport. Using ecological woodland management principles – minimum cultivation, natural regeneration, weeding by hand, selective felling, using the timber close to where it's grown – can minimise the carbon and other environmental impacts and create good habitats for wildlife.

If you have a piece of woodland or intend to plant woodland for firewood, start by considering how much wood you'll need. Bear in mind any other uses of the woodland – for example, conservation, or the production of sawlogs – which might reduce the amount of firewood produced.

If planting a new woodland, decide what species or mixture of species to plant. Many broadleaves can be coppiced for firewood after ten to fifteen years (and on a similar rotation after that). Most conifers do not coppice, but the stand can be thinned for firewood from twenty to twenty-five years of age. Short-rotation coppice (using willows and poplars) is usually only used to produce wood-chips.



Once you have set your rotation (age of the trees at felling), you can divide the total area of the woodland by the number of years in the rotation to get the area you can fell each year. From yield tables[1], or a simple estimate of tree growth rates, you can calculate the approximate amount of timber that will come out of each year's felled area. Add to this the amount produced by thinning the rest of the stand and you have your annual timber supply.

You can physically divide the woodland into compartments for annual felling (these felling coupes can be rectangular or any
other convenient shape, and some foresters work with strips, to ensure a good fall of seed into the felled area from adjacent trees) or spread the felling throughout the forest, in an uneven-aged or irregular system (which needs a lot more planning and control).

Traditionally, coppice was a common way of producing firewood. Good species include ash, oak and sycamore.

Conifers are not suitable. The coppice stools are cut every ten to fifteen years, yielding a large amount of easily carried poles that can be simply cross-cut (no need for splitting). A variant on this is coppice-with-standards, where a number of trees are grown on to maturity (eighty to a hundred years or more) to produce valuable sawlogs (plus a fair amount of branchwood), while the rest of the trees continue to be managed as coppice.

Access is a crucial issue in woodlands, so plan for rides or tracks to reach most parts of the wood. If possible, avoid cutting the area adjacent to the previous year's, as most wildlife benefits from woodland edges between taller and shorter trees, and you also benefit from tree seed falling into the newly-cut coupe. Consider a mixture of tree species, which makes management and yield forecasting more complicated, but provides: (a) insurance against a catastrophe (for example, disease); (b) more flexibility to fell more or less in any year; (c) a variety of timbers, some of which will dry faster than others; (d) more diverse wildlife habitats; (e) a more complete use of the sunlight to produce usable timber.

Try to use contractors with low-impact equipment – small machines do less damage to the soil and the remaining trees. A neighbouring farmer will often be able to extract timber with a tractor and trailer, saving the cost of bringing in specialised harvesting equipment. Or you can buy or hire small-scale machinery for extracting timber, such as small tractors, ATV-mounted skidders and mini-forwarders. Your local machinery ring may be able to help with equipment hire.

1 Yield tables give growth in cubic metres. Most broadleaves grow more slowly than most softwoods. However, yield tables exclude branchwood, which comprises a major part of a broadleaved tree's wood. In addition, hardwood timber is denser than softwood, so, when dry, you'll get one-and-a-half to two times as much energy from a cubic metre of hardwood than softwood.

BUYING, DRYING AND STORING FIREWOOD

Buying wood

Firewood is becoming increasingly expensive, mainly because demand has risen dramatically over the past ten years. If buying from a merchant, be clear about what you're buying, especially with regard to whether it is hardwood or softwood, wet or dry, and to the volume.

Dry hardwood should be most expensive and wet softwood cheapest. Sawmill offcuts are often a good cheap source of firewood, although they may come in large or irregular-shaped pieces.

Don't buy firewood by weight. Unless you have a weighbridge, you can't accurately estimate a ton, and the merchant is tempted to supply wet logs, which are heavier. So, buy by volume – it's easy to calculate, since most lorries and bulk bags (a special bag made from open plastic mesh to allow air movement) are roughly cuboid. Use the conversion factors on p201 to convert loose-piled logs (how they are in the delivery lorry or bulk bag) to stacked wood. Check

several logs from various places in the delivery for moisture content if the merchant has specified dry wood. You can learn to visually identify the common species from books (bark is usually the best indicator) and
a resinous smell will often, but not always, point to conifer wood.

Don't buy wood when you need it! Buy it a year before that, and store it to dry for a year. Most people buy firewood in winter and firewood merchants are busiest between October and March (more so in a cold winter), so prices will be lower, quality better and delivery quicker if you stock up in the quieter times.

Generally, the more you buy, the cheaper it is. Buying in small net bags from garage forecourts is the most expensive. Cheapest is to buy direct from the forest owner or harvesting contractor, who can deliver in 20-tonne loads of 2m-long (or longer) softwood logs, which will need to be cross-cut and split. You need a fair bit of space for an articulated lorry to unload and to process and stack this quantity of wood.

Best of all is to harvest it yourself. If you don't have your own wood, it may be possible to arrange with a woodland owner to harvest their timber. Thinning woods is often too expensive for commercial contractors, so, if you can offer to do this on a small scale, providing the owner with at least some income and cutting only the trees that need to be removed to improve the quality of the remaining woodland, then there are benefits all round.

With this type of DIY forestry, a forester's advice is essential to identify which trees should be cut, but there are many benefits, including being able to stack logs to dry in the

forest, minimising transport of heavy, wet wood, and reducing the space needed in a drying shed. Minimum equipment would include a chainsaw and safety gear, plus tractor and trailer (which could be hired), although there are now all sorts of equipment to make small-scale forestry easier. Training is very important when working with any machinery, but especially chainsaws.

There are several options open to you for cross-cutting and splitting logs. Depending on the time and strength you have available, you could use manual equipment – such as bowsaws and splitting axes or mauls (or a log grenade for difficult logs) – or you could use motor-manual equipment, such as chainsaws and powered log-splitters. Alternatively, there is the possibility of using fully-motorised equipment, like firewood processors that not only cross-cut and split, but also load split logs on to a trailer. Or you can use a combination. I use a chainsaw and
splitting maul for my household supply, but it's common for small woodland owners to hire in a firewood processor (farm machinery rings can often arrange this). Ensure that you cut logs to the right size to fit your woodburning stove or boiler.

Drying firewood

Wet wood might burn but most of the heat will go in evaporating moisture, and will generate smoke and tar, which coat your chimney and cause chimney fires. Drying logs for fuel is not an exact science and the rate at which it is accomplished depends on:

- Density of wood (depending mainly on species and growth rate).
- Size of log.

- Permeability of bark and other exposed surfaces (birch bark must be split!).
- Season.
- Climate (including moisture content of air, sunniness, windiness, rainfall and number of rainy days, etc), which can vary from year to year.
- Design of woodstack (orientation and porosity of stack).
- Shading from sun.
- Roof of shelter (water-resistance; extent of overhang).
- Proximity of vegetation or structures impeding airflow.

Drying times will vary greatly according to where you are in the country, and depending on the design and location of the drying structure. As a broad rule, most softwoods can dry to 20% moisture content (MC) in one summer (apart from slow-grown, dense trees, especially larch). Most hardwoods will need at least one full year and denser woods such as elm, holly, oak or yew will need two or three years. A loose pile or bulk bag of logs will dry quickly if air-flow is good, but a stack saves a lot of space.

A moisture meter will be very helpful to ensure that you only burn wood below 20% MC (and preferably around 15%). Some timber should not be burnt on a stove, including seashore driftwood (salt corrodes metalwork), painted or preserved wood (it will give off unpleasant and poisonous gases), and wood with many nails in it (it can damage your grate).

Drying sheds and shelters

Firewood logs need to be dried and then kept dry. In practice, this usually means the drying shed and the woodstore are the same structure.

The most basic structure is a simple stack of logs held together by supports at each end, and with a basic roof (often a tarpaulin). These drying stacks are often used for in-forest drying, as they require minimum investment of time and materials, but they are mainly used for an initial drying period, since rain running off the tarp slows drying.

Drying sheds can be bought from commercial suppliers, be purpose-built or simply be converted garden sheds. The key components are a roof extending some way from the stack (to prevent rainwater running into the stack), end supports or walls to hold the stack together and a base to keep the bottom layer of logs off the ground. Pallets are very useful as ready-made, ventilated floors, walls and roof-frames (easily covered with tarpaulin, plastic sheet or plywood/OSB sheets. Polytunnels make ideal drying sheds, as long as there is adequate ventilation and the wood is raised off the ground. Special bulk bags made of mesh can also be stacked on top of each other in a larger shed or polytunnel, but you need a forklift truck to move them.

In order to determine just how much wood and drying space you'll need, it's first necessary to calculate your heating requirements. Even if you are only heating one room, this can be fiendishly complex as it depends on such factors as its size and shape, the number and type of windows, the number of external walls, insulation and draught-proofing, and of course, the temperature you require.

As a rough estimate, a large room of 50m^3 volume (for example, length 5m x width 4m x height 2.5m) needs a stove rated at 4kW (see www.thestoveco.com for heat calculations, and www. hetas.co.uk for stove efficiency).

However, calculating domestic firewood needs for a whole home adds another set of complexities, including: (a) how many rooms of what size are to be heated; (b) whether you use woodstoves in each room or a central heating system with a boiler; (c) whether the boiler has to heat your hot water supply
as well; (d) the number of days in the year and hours per day that the room needs to be heated.

As an example, using the 4kW woodstove, and assuming an annual operating period of 150 days per year with an average of ten hours per day, the woodfuel demand would be 3.5m^3 of stacked hardwood firewood, or 5.4m^3 of softwood. To provide this amount of woodfuel, you need to have a drying shed with two years' supply (one drying, one being used). If you have one large woodshed rather then several drying stacks, then you'll need space for access, to get at the logs at the back – say 25% of the total volume. So you'll need a shed of about 10m3 volume (say 2m x 2.5m x 2m, plus roofspace) for hardwood, or about 15m^3 (say 3m x 2.5m x 2m, plus roofspace) for softwood.

Conversion factors: from loose-piled logs to stacked wood

1m^3 of fresh, or wet, timber (solid volume) weighs about 1t (tonne)

$1m^3$ of solid timber is equivalent to $2.5m^3$ of loose-piled chopped firewood, which is equivalent to $1.49m^3$ of stacked chopped firewood

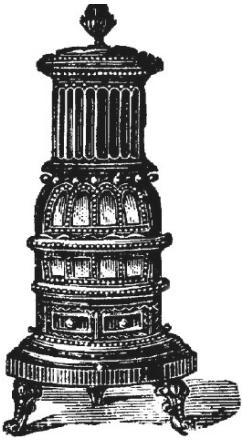
Stacked softwood logs (wet): $1m^3 = 0.7t$; or $1t = 1.5m^3$

Stacked hardwood logs (wet): $1m^3 = 0.75t$; or $1t = 1.4m^3$

Stacked softwood logs (dry): $1m^3 = 0.28t$; or $1t = 3.6m^3$

Stacked hardwood logs (dry): $1m^3 = 0.42t$; or $1t = 2.4m^3$

Seasoned softwood chips (at 25% MC) have a bulk density of between 150-250kg/m3 depending on species (ie 1m3 weighs 150-250kg)



HEATING YOUR HOME WITH WOODFUEL

A woodstove or boiler is essential to burn wood efficiently. An open wood fire is a very wasteful way to heat a room, because there is no control of air flow within the fire, leading to some parts of the fire getting too much air and some too little. This in turn leads to inefficient combustion, wasting the wood's energy and producing a lot of smoke. Also, there is no control of air flow up the chimney – up to 80% of the heat from the fire can be lost as hot gases from the fire and warm air from the room are sucked up the chimney.

Types of woodfuel

Woodfuel can be usefully divided into three main types: logs, chips and pellets. Briquettes (made from compressed sawdust) are increasingly used as a substitute for logs.

LOGS

Logs are the low-tech end of woodfuel, and treated as unimportant or as 'Good Life' accessories by some. One study concluded that logs are eight times more carbon-efficient than pellets, and significantly better than chips, due to the minimal processing needed. Although nobody knows the true figure, logs probably provide more heat in more homes than any other woodfuel. Log suppliers are mostly small businesses, supplying local markets, providing jobs in rural areas and encouraging management of neglected woodlands. Of course, you can also produce your own log fuel from your own woodlands – the cheapest and most effective way to keep warm. Briquettes are an alternative to logs, using sawdust, wood shavings etc, with no additives and therefore similar emissions to burning logs.

Log stoves, which have been used for over a hundred years, are nowadays very efficient (60–90% compared with 20–30% for an open fire), although they do emit significant amounts of particulate and NOX pollutants. Modern log boilers 'pyrolyse' the wood, turning it into gas, which is then burnt extremely efficiently and with minimal emissions.

When they are fresh, softwood logs have a moisture content of 60–65%; hardwood's MC is 40–45%. When logs are properly dried, the MC should be 10–20%, and the lower it is, the better it will burn.

WOOD CHIPS

Commercially available wood chips tend to be from softwood logs, because of cost, uniformity and the quantities needed to justify expensive equipment. Chipping is done either at

roadside or in the yard, and the chips must be screened to remove any over-or under-sized or very long chips, which would jam in augers. Many woodfuel chippers have integral screens. Logs for chipping can be dried, sometimes in tarp-covered stacks in the forest, but, since timber hardens as it dries, this can increase wear on the chipper blades. Wet chips need to be dried with air blown through the stack. Piles of wet chips have been known to start decomposing, generating a lot of heat and even catching fire. Wood chips are delivered in bulk bags, tipper lorries or bulk lorries with blowers, depending on the size, design and location of the hopper.

The main problems with wood chips are that the boilers have narrow tolerances for the moisture content of the chips (which can vary between 15% and 35%), whilst augers require chips of very limited sizes (although these vary between boilers).

PELLETS

Pellets are generally manufactured in large plants, since they require the wood to be dried, pulverised and then extruded, under extreme pressure, using large amounts of (mainly softwood) logs and sawmill waste to generate heat and power for the process. Pellets are delivered in blower lorries, bulk bags or small (5kg or 10kg) bags. Pellets are easy to use and, with a low MC, are a concentrated source of heat. There are now several manufacturers in Scotland.

Best species for firewood

There is no single best species of tree for firewood. Denser woods take longer to dry, but burn longer. Softwoods, poplar and willow, tend to spit, but that is no problem in a stove.

Within reason, all timber will burn, provided it is properly dried. Even bushes, such as holly, hawthorn and elder, produce good firewood, although smaller logs mean more work for a given amount of timber.

For simplicity, firewood can be grouped roughly by density, which is more or less related to their energy content and drying time:

- ‘Light’ woods include aspen, cypress, fir, lime, pine, poplar and spruce.
- ‘Medium’ woods are ash, beech, birch, horse chestnut, larch, plane, rowan, sycamore and willow.
- ‘Dense’ woods include elm, holly, oak, sweet chestnut and yew.

Wood-burning technology: heaters and boilers

The main distinction is between individual room heaters and boilers that heat water for radiators and/or hot water supply. Logs and pellets can be burnt in stoves that heat single rooms, and some stoves have back-boilers or water-jackets to heat water as well. Pellet stoves have an automatic feed from a hopper on top, which is filled from small bags, and programmable self-ignition, so they can light up to warm the house or water before you get home. However, log-burning stoves require you to light and refuel them when you get home.

Logs and pellets can also be burnt in boilers to heat water. Again, pellets are fed automatically from a hopper, while logs need to be hand-fed. Many people with log boilers will do a burn every one or two days, with the hot water stored in a

large, well-insulated accumulator tank.

Wood chips are always burnt in automatic-feed boilers, which can be operated on a programmable timer. Since they are quite bulky, they require a big hopper, with (usually) an auger feed to bring the chips to the boiler. In general, wood chip boilers are suitable for heating entire houses; larger houses and other buildings (or district heating systems) being more economical because of the cost of the equipment. Such systems are best fitted during construction. Pellet and log boilers can be suitable for heating whole houses of all sizes and can be easily retrofitted to an existing radiator system. Log and pellet stoves, suitable for single rooms, can be easily retrofitted into most existing houses.

Pellets and pellet stoves are expensive, probably on a par with oil heating. Buying logs or chips is much cheaper, but, while log stoves are cheap, a wood chip system is expensive to buy and install. Prices and technologies are changing all the time, so do some research before deciding what to get.

What is smoke?

The smoke that a fire gives off is actually a complex and varying mixture of, mainly, soot (carbon particles), tar (partly-burnt oily droplets), plus water vapour and other volatile substances – including organic acids – given off by burning wet wood, which condense into tiny droplets on meeting cold air as they leave the chimney. Clearly, you don't want to breathe these, or to have them coating the inside of your chimney. Smokeless zones are based on legislation to reduce particulate emissions (which caused the 'pea-souper' smogs of early twentieth century London), which are damaging to lungs.

Burning wood in any way produces these emissions (as well as nitrogen and sulphur oxides, and, of course, carbon dioxide produced by complete combustion), but new 'clean burn' stoves dramatically reduce emissions (to the extent that they can be used in smokeless zones), and many pellet stoves and boilers, wood chip boilers and gasifying log boilers have very low emissions.

How to run a woodstove efficiently

If you follow these simple rules, a woodstove can provide many years of loyal service.

- Don't burn wet wood.
- Don't mix wood and coal, which have completely different burning characteristics and requirements.
- Don't cut the air supply unless necessary. For instance, cutting off air to keep a wood fire burning all night will clog your chimney with soot and tar. The most efficient fire is one where the fuel is glowing red with very little flame.
- Keep the fire as constant as possibly by adding logs regularly, rather than allowing the fire to burn down completely before refuelling.
- Installing a flue-gas thermometer will help you to manage your fire to burn most efficiently.
- Clean the chimney and flue pipes regularly – at least once a year if heavily used.
- Ensure all the seals around doors, etc, are working properly to allow proper control of airflow. Most seals are

fireproof rope, which can fray or become detached over time. Fireproof glue and rope can be bought from any woodstove shop.

COMMON WOODS FOUND IN SCOTLAND

ASH

Although known as the ‘king of firewoods’ and reputed to burn when fresh, it needs to be dry to burn well. It’s very easy to split and relatively easy to saw. Ash grows very fast and does very well as coppice. It often grows straight, unbranched stems and so is ideal for making firewood.

BEECH

A hard, yellow or golden brown wood, this tree can grow very large. It cuts and splits easily and dries relatively quickly, though burns slowly.

BIRCH

A hard, white wood that rarely grows to large diameters. It also cuts and splits easily and dries relatively quickly, although the bark adheres, which can slow the drying process if it’s not split. A slow burner.

ELM

An increasingly rare tree, except as coppice, due to Dutch elm disease. However, it is dense and burns well. Elm is similar to oak, although it is more fibrous and the grain is often very contorted, making it more difficult to split.

HAWTHORN

This common bush can produce a lot of small-diameter logs if allowed to grow tall. It has a dense, hard (but easily split), red heartwood and a lighter, whiter sapwood. It dries fairly easily but can be gnarled and so be difficult to split.

LARCH

A dense wood, similar to medium hardwoods, that burns hot.

OAK

A fine, dense wood that makes excellent firewood, which burns long and hot. It splits relatively easily, although it's hard to saw and takes a long time to dry. Non-native oaks are very diffferent – for instance, Turkey oak is much less dense and more fibrous.

SPRUCE

A light wood that is very wet, but dries very quickly. It's also light and burns fast once dry, so it's a good fuel, although stoking will need to be frequent. It cuts easily but is fibrous and knotty so splits less easily.

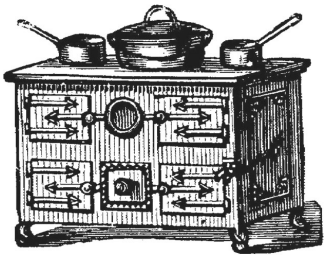
SYCAMORE

A hard, silvery or golden wood that is very wet when fresh. It cuts and splits easily and dries quite quickly. Sycamore burns slowly and is similar to Norway maple, although it can grow much larger.

WILLOW

A wet and moderately fibrous wood, but one that dries relatively quickly and burns well once dry, sometimes with a bit of spitting.

Nick Marshall



COOKING WITH WOOD

Many people use wood to heat their house and hot water but believe that using wood for cooking as well is a ‘step too far’. An article in *Living Woods* magazine even suggested that the stress of relying on wood for cooking could be a threat to one’s marriage! After five years of cooking every day on a wood-fired range, I have to disagree. Indeed I would consider it a shocking waste of energy to have a stove burning away and not use the heat generated to cook our supper. Whenever we stay away from home and cook on a conventional electric or gas stove I realise we have adapted our cooking style to the range, but I don’t believe this involves any compromise. With a bit of planning we can have a hot oven or hob when needed and while things may cook, in general, more slowly, the results are worth waiting for and nothing ever over-cooks. With experience we have mastered a control that allows us to fry, roast, grill or bake anything we wish to cook. And the marriage remains strong!

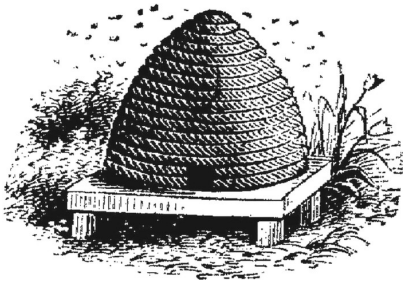
Being reliant on wood requires a good supply of seasoned logs. Our particular range is a lovely hybrid of traditional looks and modern efficiency but, even so, it can be a hungry beast in winter. The secret of getting the maximum efficiency,

as with all woodstoves, is to burn well-seasoned logs (less than 25% moisture) and to burn the logs hot. In the middle of winter we get through one medium-sized log basket a day. That heats three
radiators in addition to all our cooking and hot water. Every wood-burning enthusiast has a system for ensuring a continual wood supply but again patience is the only essential. All wood will season if left in dry, airy conditions long enough – but this can take up to two years.

Some men polish their cars every Sunday. I like to run an e-cloth over the shiny blue enamel of my range. I get equal satisfaction from forays into the local wood for dead ash trees that have seasoned standing, and then from wielding a splitting axe with deft precision, to reveal the parallel grain within a dry log; and a pile of neatly stacked logs is something to be really proud of. My wife, meanwhile, keeps a small, single-ring, electric hob stored in a cupboard – just for emergencies!

Ian Edwards

CHAPTER TEN



BRINGING THE WILD BACK HOME

Aside from food, there are other ways to bring the wild back home, some of them far more permanent than what we consume. This chapter starts by looking at the world from a craftsperson's perspective and the crafts that have well-established niches in the modern world, then focuses in on a few individual species and what they can be used for.

It covers only a few out of a wide array of possibilities. There is no space here to cover tree resin (used as a sealant, a fire-lighter, to add friction to the fiddler's bow, and for much more besides). Bone and antler; fibres for cloth and string; extracts for perfumes, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals; the many uses of moss; the varieties of decorative foliage; all have been left out. There's scarcely a mention of fungi, which offer medicines, first aid, fire-lighters, razor strops, dyes and more. Few of the many skills being rediscovered as 'bushcraft' get a look-in. This is not the full story, merely a taster, an introduction.

Along the way, inevitably, the writers touch on land management. Several mention coppicing, which means cutting trees down to the ground (annually or on a several-year cycle), then letting new shoots grow back from the stumps, or 'stools'. This method of managing a woodland – whether wild or planted – creates rich wildlife habitat at the same time as producing useful, uniform materials for craft use or firewood. Harvesting itself has impacts, and sometimes – as in the case of taking away docken seeds and pulling bracken – these will delight the landowners. Other writers touch on cultivating species needed in far greater bulk than our remaining wilderness can offer, and on the decline of wild species and wild places.

So this chapter ends with a brief glimpse of the ways in which people garden with the wild. You'll read how to gather seeds for recreating wildflower meadows and for planting locally-sourced trees; how to make fabulous leafmould; how (and why) to start enhancing your garden with weeds.

Forest gardening gives us one way of tying it all together. Despite the name, the best place for a forest garden is not in a wood, but right next to where people live or work – people who can see the garden with foragers' eyes, and the wild with gardeners' eyes, creating a carefully managed mass of useful species, making niches and curbing competition. The result is often a 'wall of green'; enticingly natural, unashamedly comfortable and domestic, informed by foraging and yet also reducing the burden our appetites and needs place upon the wild.

Emma Chapman

NATURAL DYES OF THE SEASON

Somebody once said, 'The trouble about dyeing with plants is they all make yellow or if you're lucky, green.' Well, that's true to some extent – but what yellows! Gold and lemon, buttercup and brass, sunshine and sand... and the greens: forest and sage, moss and emerald. Most yellows can be turned to a green by adding iron to the dye bath towards the end or a greenish yellow by dyeing in an iron pot.

For most dyes, mordant the wool with alum and cream of tartar, preferably before dyeing, but it can sometimes be done during the dyeing process. Use a substantial quantity of a very common plant material when it is in season, and boil it up in a big iron pot, simmering it for quite a long time with the wool. The only exception to this is when using lichens, which can be gathered and dried for dyeing in the winter.

The dyeing year begins with the nettle. Soft, pale yellow, or grey-green if boiled with iron. The nettle in spring will give a much softer colour than the nettle in autumn and the top part of the roots, when you pull them, will yield a lovely deep yellow.

Bracken fiddleheads also appear early on. They are quick and easy to pick, and by picking them you are doing a service to the land. They produce a fine olive green in an iron pot.

Young birch leaves come next, a real 'acid' yellow, best dyed in a stainless steel pot for a clear colour. The smell is wonderful as it boils, only surpassed by the bog myrtle, next on the agenda. The birch leaves and the bog myrtle give up

their colour quickly to the water with boiling, so you can strain the dye liquid before adding the wool. This saves a lot of time shaking out the plant material from the fibres.

Alder leaves, heather tips and dock seeds all have their place and time, particularly dock seeds. They dye deep ‘orangey’ yellow and are fun to pick, running your hand up the stem and stripping off the seeds. Again, you are ‘doing a service to the land’.

Finally, in autumn there are wonderful berries and fruits around, but sadly the colours fade sooner or later. Elderberry colour lasts longer than blackberry and will often just fade to grey.

At the end of the year as the leaves die off we begin on the palette of colours from lichens, expanding the range into browns, oranges and purples.

Lesley KilBride

HEDGEROW BASKETRY

When considering making baskets from wild harvested materials you could do worse than tread in the footsteps of Scottish basket-makers of the past and use these tried and tested plant fibres: field rush (*Juncus effusus*), heather or 'ling' (*Calluna vulgaris*), hairmoss (*Polytrichum commune*) and marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*). These have either been used on their own or been combined with cultivated willow or straw.

Water rush (*Schoenoplectus lacustris agg*.) should also be mentioned, even though there is no evidence that it has been used to any extent in Scotland. It is a most delightful material to use – often growing up to two metres long – gentle on the hands and highly valued as a traditional basketmaking material in other parts of the UK. Several books have been dedicated to its many and varied uses, from traditional Bedfordshire lunch baskets to floor mats.

Other soft fibres to look out for are iris, crocosmia, daffodil, and purple moorgrass (*Molinia caerulea*).

In general the basketmaker is looking for length, flexibility,

an even girth along the length, the ability to have its flexibility reconstituted after being dried out, and abundance – you need to have a lot of the same kind of plant to create a product. Harvesting is best done at the end of the growing season while the plant is still green. Thereafter, it is dried out and stored.
Prior to being worked it is reconstituted, usually in cold water. However, fine grasses may be worked fresh as well as dry or brown.

A useful technique for working with soft fibres is to twist them into cordage. This can subsequently be used as the core in coiled baskets, either as the string that holds other elements together or as a decorative element in wood-based baskets. One example is a coiled basket with marram grass as the core and stitched with field rush cord.

Among wooden weaving materials, willow is the absolute favourite. Willow possesses all the desirable qualities mentioned above in one year's growth. This is difficult to find

in the wild as it depends on the plant being either coppiced or pollarded annually. You may come across a fallen or cut-down tree that has sent out new, long, thin shoots, but as a small fruit bowl requires over 100 weavers of the right proportion it would be nigh on impossible to harvest enough. Willow in quantity is available from many Scottish growers (see www.willowscotland.co.uk for more information). However, if you find a plant that looks and tastes right (the more bitter the better!) it could usefully be propagated at home, by pushing a 30cm rod the thickness of a little finger two-thirds of the way into the ground, and then coppicing the growth annually.

Wooden weavers should be harvested while the leaves are off (the dormant period) and left six to eight weeks in a shady place to slacken off before weaving. Look for pendulous larch, silver
birch, dogwood and all the one-year-old growth sticking out of managed hedges by the end of the summer. Even thorny twigs from blackthorn and hawthorn have had their thorns removed in order to produce a useful weaving material (and the thorns used as pins in other work!).

A lovely item to make using any wooden twigs is a garland. First make a hoop – a long de-thorned dog rose is good for this – then keep adding as many branches as you feel like. Climbers such as honeysuckle and ivy can also be incorporated.

Adding to your palette at the height of the season is bark. While the sap is rising, leather-like straps of bark can be stripped off one- or two-year-old branches. If you are not using it straight away, roll it up with the inside out and secure with string or an elastic band. Birch bark can be cut without

killing the tree, but the precise method should be studied first and permission sought.

Finally, there is much to learn from other cultures: roots from birch and sitka are highly valued in Scandinavia and Alaska respectively, as are pine needles on the American west coast. However, a good way to get started with basketmaking in Scotland is to contact the Scottish Basketmakers' Circle. See www.scottishbasketmakerscircle.org for more information.

Lise Bech

GREEN WOODWORKING

If you go to a big countryside show, the forestry section will be full of huge machines, chainsaws, bandsaws – all the modern noise of working in the woods. Imagine the green woodworker's stall in the midst of all of that: one man with a curious contraption that lets him turn a chair leg using just the power of his own leg, and with no more noise than the slight 'shhh… shhh… shhh…' of the chisel.

Timber is usually seasoned before use – stored for a long while in a dry place, or heated to drive off the moisture. Green wood is unseasoned, often straight from the tree; it is much softer and easier to split, turn and carve, which is why it lends itself so well to being worked with hand tools. Later, as the worked piece dries out, the stresses and strains within it change, altering its shape a little. Chair legs worked in the green are often oval, rather than perfectly round. You could see this as a flaw, but the spirit of green woodwork is character and uniqueness.

Green woodwork requires just a few basic tools and skills. Cleaving the wood is the first step. A shave horse – made

with a few bits of green wood – then lets the force and weight of your legs hold the working piece in place, as you shape it with a draw knife. This tool is used two-handed, with a blade which moves towards your body, but shaped so it never reaches it! Finally, a pole lathe, also made from woodland materials, and powered,
via a treadle, by your foot, is used to turn the piece into a finished product.

Sometimes it's good to work without the lathe, just with the draw knife: you can find the natural shapes within the piece of wood, and work with them. Even simpler, green wood is the material of choice for whittling and carving, producing a whole range of objects, from slender spoons to mighty totem poles.

Once you become a green woodworker, or 'bodger', you never look at a chair the same again, always looking to see how they're made, noticing the different styles, the way they're put together. You look at branches and sticks very differently as well: you'll see a curve, and realise that the piece could be split to make a matching pair of curved legs or arms. It gives you a curiosity about how things are made and done, because you know you could probably make them yourself. Even historical building techniques start to make more sense.

There were old traditions of green woodworking in Scotland. Coopers used a type of shave horse, and draw knives, for making barrels. Clogs were made from cleft wood, so were coracles. Everyday objects such as rake handles and cart wheels were locally made. Museums still hold green wood products, and tools used to make them, such as a hand-held gadget used to split a hazel wand lengthwise into quarters.

There are always new possibilites, too. When cleaving wood, you sometimes hear noises – musical notes as the wood springs apart. Those sounds were the inspiration for making xylophones and other woodland instruments, heard around Scotland over the past few years.

There's also a great value in passing on the skills. Young folk especially love going home with something they've made, on their very first day, and being asked, 'Where did you get that? - it's magic!' Turning wood with just the strength of their own legs builds co-ordination skills and confidence – without the dangers of power tools. It's a way to introduce children to the proper use of axes, chisels, and saws. Give them some basic safety rules, and they remind each other: 'Don't do it that way.' Give them the skills, and there's no end to what they can make and discover for themselves.

Kenny Grieve and Emma Chapman

USEFUL SPECIES

BIRCH
Betula species

Silver birch (*Betula pendula*) and downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) are common throughout Scotland. Beautiful trees, silver birch are easily identified by their bright, striking, often peeling bark, and small vivid green leaves. Downy birch trees have duller bark, and slightly darker leaves that are noticeably downy to the touch. To make it more complicated, the two species hybridise, though true species and hybrids are all readily recognisable as birch.

Birch bark containers helped to preserve the shelf-life of foods in the pre-fridge era. The compound in birch bark that is so effective is called betulin and is antifungal, antibacterial, and antibiotic. Birch bark also contains salicylins, like willow bark, which are pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory.

It had a tremendous array of traditional uses, including for dye, paper, kindling, musical instruments, and as strong, lightweight timber, and its sap can be used to prepare wine and
syrup: see p98 in Wines, Teas and Cordials. The syrup and wine are making a comeback, and people are beginning to rediscover some of the craft uses as well.

You can drive from the centre of Inverness, over Drumochter Pass, to the centre of Edinburgh and not be out of sight of a birch tree, it is so widespread. They provide useful material from Shetland to the Western Isles. As always, ask

permission from owners before harvesting.

Monica Wilde

Craft uses of birch

BARK

It is surprising how pliable birch bark is. During spring and early summer, select trees with few side branches, about the diameter of a thigh. Use a ladder to reach smoother bark higher up. If the tree is ready, with the sap loosening it, the bark can be peeled in horizontal sheets after cutting round the tree with a knife, then a vertical cut to start the peeling, using hand and knife: this will not kill the tree.

The paler the inner bark the better for craft work. Store the sheets of bark between boards to stop curling: wonderfully, it can be used immediately or put aside for years and still be suitable.

Cut into 2cm strips it can be used for weaving with no

treatment. It is a very strong material and will make large, lidded baskets and arrow quivers at one end of the scale to finger rings at the other. By weaving the material back over itself, the basket can be four layers thick.

Even small pieces can be folded and made in to flower petals, or long strips can be threaded on to shaved twigs and put in boiling water to get random exotic shapes.

ROOTS

Harvest roots from damp ground where they will be near the surface and can be found by scraping with a stick then following them to their ends. Birch roots are surprisingly strong and can be very long. They are very pliable when fresh and can hold their diameter over great distances. If not using them straight away, keep them in a bucket of water.

If you can do it with string, you can do it with roots! Use them, with their bark scraped off, for stitching bark together, making knots, rings, earrings and weaving fish mobiles. The roots will dry hard.

FINE TWIGS

Fresh winter twigs off the tree can be woven in to circles,

chains or tree shapes, even as you walk through a wood. Small bunches, tied tightly together, make excellent pot scourers. Bunches of longer twigs make a great broom head on a stout handle.

Long shoots from coppice growth, dried under cover, can be used in the coiling basketry technique; coiled round and oval baskets, full-size bee skeps and curling stone baskets are some of the possibilities. Use sisal string with an upholstery needle for the binding, and the top of a plastic drinks bottle as a funnel for feeding in the twigs to maintain the diameter.

THICKER TWIGS AND STEMS

Birch twigs can be crafted into pencils, catapults, whistles; larger pieces can be used for simple baskets, and all manner of craft and small wood projects.

NO WASTE

Finger-sized off-cuts can be stacked in a syrup tin, packed with fine sand, with the lid tightly closed with a pin hole punched in it, and put in a fire for a few hours to produce artist's charcoal.

Sawdust and fine bark scraps can be used for papermaking. Other small scraps of bark can be used to decorate greetings cards – bark with lichens on looks especially attractive. Dried and pressed leaves, natural or sprayed gold look beautiful on cards. Experiment with paper cutters. Silhouettes can be achieved by spraying, too. Consider enclosing some birch seeds in with the cards for the recipients to create a new woodland!

The uses for birch are limited only by your imagination – and

everything described here can be done with hand tools. If you do have anything left over – birch burns hot and fast.

Bryce Reynard

BRACKEN
Pteridium aquilinum

Bracken inspires the kind of fury usually reserved for alien invaders, but it is a native of Britain, and was once a valued resource. This many-branched perennial fern has a persistent rhizome system underground which spreads vigorously.

Bracken is tolerant of a range of soils, in the neutral to acid range, but does not like to be waterlogged. It is particularly prone to colonising grazing land, and is poisonous to livestock, which is why it rouses such hatred.

Craft uses of bracken

FUEL

On rich soil, bracken grows prolifically, and produces plenty of biomass. This gives it modern potential as biofuel, mulch or a source of humus-rich compost. In the past there were laws and customs divvying up the rights to harvest it for material-hungry purposes such as fuel, bedding, dye, potash – and thatch.

THATCHING

The soft green of summer bracken fronds looks an unlikely choice for a durable roof, but, used in the right way, bracken thatch could
last a lifetime. Its reputation among traditional thatchers was so great that it is hard to understand why it is now rarely used: until you hear what the process entails. Gathering bracken is very slow; each stem is pulled – a two-handed operation – with the back hand stripping the leaves off the stem. It takes an hour to gather one hug-sized bundle, and it requires five or six bundles to thatch one square metre of roof. Just the last two inches of each stem should show in the finished roof; these are the dark 'bun dubh', tough against weathering. The roof should look brown-black, like liquorice – a beautiful effect.

Thatch made from uniform, straight materials, like straw or reed, is mostly thrown on in bundles, then just tapped in place. You can't tap bracken (it would catch, and damage), so it is laid on stem by stem; a very slow process, and very fiddly, because of the rigid, irregular ends. There is a very restricted time window for the harvest, as well. It has to be in autumn: after the first frost, but before any flattening winds and rain have come. If you harvest too early, you can't strip

the leaves cleanly without damaging the stem; too late, and the bracken has folded over and become soft. All this, during a time of year which is really vulnerable to strong winds, and when the days are short. And the material won't store long – it needs to be used within a couple of weeks – so the whole task has to be done very quickly, within a prescribed period of time. The whole roof has to be completed in one season, as after a few months the bracken becomes brittle and you must not disturb it.

So could bracken thatch possibly have a future?

The harvest requires a large number of people for a short time: forty people for a week to gather enough for a full-size roof. Paying for that amount of time would be prohibitive – but it is one of those rare situations where the work is ideal for unskilled volunteers. Anyone can do it. People who can't get about so well can just sit and strip the stems. Some people can just carry the bundles. Rather than raise money to buy commercially grown material, a community group can work together in the woods: a communal event. The midges are gone; the autumn colours are gorgeous; the work is quiet and peaceful. Crucially, it also fits well with October school holidays.

The future for this time-consuming, durable, striking-looking roofing may also lie in people being realistic about the size of roof they take on. It could prove ideal for small projects: huts, summer houses, compost loos, interpretative projects.

Bracken is just one wild plant traditionally used for thatch. Different building styles evolved, all relating to what was available, to land use, and to what grew in abundance. As well as the worldwide staples of reed and straw, thatchers

used marram, rushes, heather (see p32 in the Key Species chapter) and broom. Each material has its own lore, techniques, applications. Each has its virtues and drawbacks, its season for harvesting, its own abundance or limits under modern land use regimes. We still have a living connection with the old traditions – people who have worked with the best of the old thatchers. Now is the time to find new applications for old techniques, the time for those skills to be passed on, or lost.

Brian Wilson and Emma Chapman

HAZEL
Corylus avellana

Hazel will fruit in three years if planted in groups, and will produce straight, tough but pliable rods if coppiced five or more years after planting. (‘Coppicing’ means cutting an entire tree close to the ground in the winter and letting it grow back from the remaining stump or ‘stool’.) Propagation is

possible through layering – bending a living branch down to the ground and pinning it into the soil, to encourage it to grow roots and become an independent stem. However, planting bare-root transplants in the winter is by far the most usual method of establishing hazel. The bark and young growth is palatable to rabbits and may have to be protected from these and other herbivores, particularly in hard winters when food is scarce.

Hazel coppice can be harvested and worked during the winter months when the tree is dormant and shut down. This gives the coppice stool some time to recover and produce a new crop of regrowth over the years before the coppice is harvested again. The 'brash', or unused branches, is often piled up over the stump, to give the regrowth some protection from rabbits.

Hazel rods are far more durable out of doors than willow (see below). Their useful life can be extended if they are kept clear of the ground and other vegetation or stored in a shed when not required.

For more information about hazel, see p29 in the Key Species chapter.

Craft uses of hazel

HURDLES

Hazel can be used to make screens, windbreaks, fences or retaining edges of beds. Hurdles are made with freshly cut, or 'green', two-metre rods. They are quite pliable but very stiff so strong arms are required for the task.

HEDGELAYING

Hazel is a quintessential component of a well-laid hedge. It provides the upright stakes and the ‘bindings’ or ‘heathering’ (woven top edge) of many hedgelaying styles and techniques.

STICKS AND POLES

Hazel rods make excellent pea sticks and runner bean poles. You will get many seasons’ use out of them if they are wintered out of the ground and in a shed.

You can also fashion excellent traditional walking sticks from hazel rods. Just carefully select what you need from a well-established hazel bush: somewhere you will find the perfect thickness and clean length for you. A hand pruning saw is ideal to get into the tight, multi-stemmed, busy base of the plant.

Fred Conacher

HONEY BEE
Apis mellifera

Far more ancient than human beings, the honey bee is believed to have been kept as livestock since Neolithic times. More waspish than a bumble bee, more furry and deeper-coloured than a wasp, honey bees are distinguished by the ability to overwinter as a colony, rather than as individual,

hibernating queens. This is achieved by complex social organisation and superior technology. The latter is the waterproof wax that allows the colony to store
food for winter use – stores that are all too desirable to other creatures, including beekeepers.

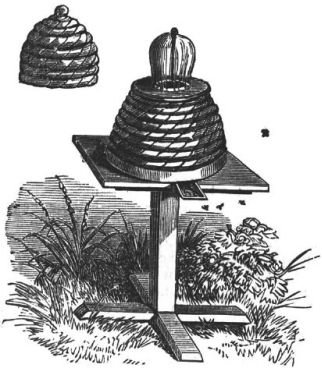
For building its nest, the colony seeks a dark, dry cavity that catches enough sun, not too much wind, and is close enough to plenty of forage. In the wild this would usually mean a hollow in a tree, but in modern times a chimney or outbuilding may be all that is available. With the current impact of pests, diseases and habitat loss, most colonies in Scotland live in purpose-built beehives.

Craft uses of honey bees

Honey and wax

Honey bees bring the wild home to us in several ways. Most obviously, they are themselves foragers par excellence, each colony working plants for up to three miles around for nectar, pollen, and sticky, antiseptic propolis. Beekeepers appropriate much of this harvest for themselves, once the bees have processed it into honey and wax.

Honey can be seen as a precious medicine, rather than a mere food, powerful enough that it is used in modern hospitals. It also provides beverages, cosmetics – and, of course, amazing sweetness. The wax is an especially versatile product; skin creams, leather dressings, furniture polish, grafts on trees and candles are just a few of its uses. Like honey, it should not be taken for granted, as it costs a significant amount of bee power – and nectar – to create it.



BEEKEEPING

Bees also bring the wild into people's lives simply by being themselves. They are ancient, native, and, despite our best (and worst) efforts, essentially untamed. Keeping bees is a constant mystery, and an ongoing negotiation; it provides one of our most intimate domestic interactions with a wild animal species. This connection has not been altogether good for the bees. People move hives around, manipulate colonies for higher production, change and poison their habitat – and bring different populations into contact with each other, leading to devastating imports of parasites and diseases, some of which evolved in balance with entirely different species of bees. The modern beekeeper has inherited a responsibility to redress some of this harm.

Bees give their keepers a new awareness of everything that flowers. Whereas foraging salads might make you look closely at the ground by your feet, the beekeeper's eyes rove over the landscape almost as enthusiastically as the foraging bees, looking to see where, and whether, there is something to harvest.

Sadly, the open countryside often looks barren. Arable fields are kept clean of flowering weeds. Pasture is fertilised, helping wind-pollinated grass out-compete bee-pollinated wildflowers. Hedges are hacked back out of the way, or grubbed out altogether, leaving no hope of hedgerow blossom. Even verges can be mowed, too often for flowers, to suit a country homeowner's idea of tending their environs, or a council's desire to clear the view for traffic, even on long, straight stretches of road where there is no real need.

The beekeeper gazes appreciatively at the dandelions that have got away, at the scruffy gorse bearing nutritious pollen throughout the year, at the heady hawthorn blossom… and considers bringing hives into town, where people tend gardens full of flowers and streets full of broadleaved trees. There are just so many reasons for bringing the wild back home – and for finding more homes for the wild, in town and country both.

If you are interested in taking up beekeeping in Scotland, the Scottish Beekeepers' Association will provide you with a wealth of information, and contacts in your local area. See www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk for more information.

Emma Chapman

WILLOW
Salix species

Common osier (*Salix viminalis*) and other willows can be commonly found along the banks of rivers, waterways and flood plains throughout lowland Scotland. Some willow types will tolerate the most extremes of environments. Willow can be found among juniper at 1,000m in the Cairngorms, or one metre above sea level in sand dunes.

Salix is a large genus and different species within it vary greatly in shape, qualities and therefore usefulness to the gardener or crafter. Common osier is used for producing straight rods of two or three metres very quickly through coppicing. It has narrow, pointed leaves 10–20cm long, and a tree can grow seven metres high. One coppice-growing season will produce useful rods for live or dead willow work if it is growing in a bright, sunlit, damp location with fertile soil.

Osier, like most willows, will readily produce roots if in contact with bare, damp soil, so propagation is easily done by pushing cuttings into the soil as deep as you can go. However, careful selection of a clean, site-proven, disease-free willow 'donor' should be carried out, as willow is very prone to rusts and scabs – and, as with hazel, you need to be aware of the

threat of rabbits.

Also like hazel, willow coppice should be harvested and worked during winter. The most successful and comfortable time to harvest willow for 'live willow' work is late winter or early spring, so that the coppice stool recovers and produces a full year's new crop of growth over the following summer's growing season, ready for next year.

Cut willow material may be kept flexible for work by placing the cut ends in water. Dead willow is not durable outdoors if worked untreated, but its use can be extended if it is kept clear of the ground and other vegetation. Painting the worked rods with a mixture of turpentine and linseed oil will also help, particularly if the bark is removed.

The list below of potential uses for willow is by no means exhaustive. There are many other ways to make use of willow's ability to grow fast and absorb nutrients, including biomass plantations and on-site treatment of sewage and waste water.

Craft uses of willow

BASKETRY

Specially selected varieties of willow are grown for basketry. Species such as purple osier (*Salix purpurea*), white willow (*Salix alba*), and almond willow (*Salix triandra*) produce much shorter, finer and more flexible material. They are also often selected for their colour to enhance the appearance of the basket work. Bought-in 'buff' willow (which has been boiled, and stripped of bark) and other dried-out cut 'brown' willow needs to be rehydrated by soaking prior to working.

HURDLES

These can be live or dead or have live, upright, thicker rods with dead, horizontal, interwoven rods. They are used for screens, windbreaks, fences and retaining edges.

SPILING

This craft uses hurdle-making techniques to create soil-retaining walls along riverbanks, reducing soil erosion. It is most successful in sunny locations where access to the river is not required, as most of the structure will live and grow vigorously into a dense willow woodland.

SCULPTURE

Using either live or dead willow, you can form arbours, chairs, benches, tunnels, domes and dens, all of which are proving very popular in community and school projects. Living willow requires annual maintenance if the structure is to be kept neat and discernible in its purpose.

BEAN POLES AND PEA STICKS

Willow rods are perfectly good for pea sticks. Willow in its green or fresh form is flexible and may not be strong enough for use as runner bean poles, but if pushed into the garden to form a wigwam-type of plant support, it will likely ‘strike’ form roots and grow. It will then remain strong and flexible all summer. Just bear in mind that if you do not want a willow tree in the middle of your vegetable patch, you will need to dig it up once it has served its purpose. Dead willow is not as durable as hazel.

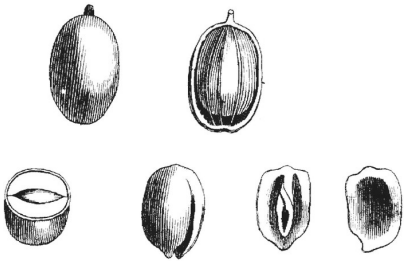
BARK

Willow bark can be stripped off when green and used to tie live willow structures in place before they grow and develop into the planned shape.

WINDBREAKS

An Angus berry farmer has planted common osier as a quick-growing windbreak between polytunnels. They were traditionally recommended, combined with brambles, as a quick-growing windbreak around beehives, where they could also provide early pollen for the bees.

Fred Conacher



SEED COLLECTING

Seeds are an often overlooked but very beautiful aspect of plants: their essence in an exquisitely precise form. Sometimes the characteristics of the seed and its container are the easiest way of distinguishing difficult plant groups, like sedges.

The main principles are much the same with common wild flowers and grasses as with trees and shrubs, though the latter tend to need processing to remove fleshy parts (whizz briefly with water in a kitchen blender) and stratifying in moist peat and sand to break dormancy. Most authorities agree that local seed collection from natural or semi-natural populations is desirable wherever possible in order to maintain the naturalness of the gene pool.

As always, it's necessary to have the permission of the landowner to collect seed, but it's really more important to ask yourself if the plants are abundant enough and will benefit from your interference. Will you help them to spread better than they do it themselves? Never collect seed from scarce, rare or endangered plants. Always take as little as possible from a population as a whole, and a small amount from a

large number of individuals will maximise the genetic variation of your collection, rather than lots of seed from one or two plants. This is particularly important if you are thinking of growing stock plants for further seed production.

Seed ripening for a particular species tends to be spread over a period of several weeks, due to genetic and environmental differences between individuals, so it is good to look around a population and see what stage things are at. The best time to collect is when a good proportion of plants have already shed their seed; this way you impact least on natural dispersal and also can be very clear on what ripe and unripe seed looks like.

Pick or cut ripe seed heads or shake ripe seed into paper or cloth bags. Never use plastic bags – the seed will sweat, overheat and die before you know it.

A dry, sunny day is best for seed collecting and after any dew has dried to avoid moulds developing. As soon as possible spread collected material out to dry/drop/explode on to sheets of newspaper or into cardboard trays (large closed paper bags or shoeboxes for exploders), in an airy place like a shed or open polytunnel. Freshly collected seed often germinates better than dried so sow straight away if possible. Otherwise leave to dry for a week or two, break up seed heads and leafy material, and use different gauge sieves and a bit of blowing or rolling down a sloping box to separate out the chaff to leave pure, clean seed. Bits of plant material will harbour insects and spores that tend to eat or destroy stored seed. Store dry seed in paper or plastic bags in a sealed container in the fridge or a cool place.

Tree seed is another whole big topic. Importantly, species with large, fleshy seeds such as oak, horse chestnut and sweet

chestnut should not be dried but are best sown fresh in autumn and protected from mice (ha ha). See the Forestry Commission Practice Guide, *Raising Trees and Shrubs from Seed*, for in-depth information on individual species, and the companion volume to this book, *A Handbook of Scotland's Trees*, for details about seed collection and propagation.

Willow Walker

LEAFMOULD

Try going to a leafmould stack, pulling out a double handful, sticking your nose in it and breathing in. Mmm… it's autumn; it's fungus; it's rot. It's a hundred moulds. It's ancient, primeval. It's decay… death. At once it's sweet, elemental. Aromas mushroom into one pure perfume. Mother Earth is here, new life. It's woodland in spring; it's inspiration… Mmm.

Compost is mainly broken down by aerobic bacteria, but leaves of woody plants have a lot of lignin that's a bit too tough for most bacteria to romp through. Fungi are the guys that evolved as prime recyclers of all woody things. They turn gold leaves into rich, red-brown leafmould. Fungi are patient old living thingys. They take their time. They don't breathe as hard as bacteria, so don't need so much air. They also really like to stay damp.

If you want a good stack of leafmould, you have to gather a whole lot of leaves in one place, outside, in the elements, and be prepared to wait. That's about all you have to do. In general, the better you can keep them from drying out, the quicker the fungi will do their thing. However, they'll take at least a full year (or two, or three) to create a soft, friable medium that roots of plants love (there's just no better medium for seedlings).

So it's best to make at least two heaps for a regular supply. Keep them in one place somehow: a simple, square net fence will stop them blowing away in a gale. Tramp them down as you go (even the most compressed heap will reduce in

volume by at least half before it's ready). You do need a lot of leaves for a good return – that's the main drawback.

Folk in big gardens and parks often rake up autumn leaves and these could be a good source within towns, even if extra items are sometimes included. In or near woods, by burnsides and loch shores, you might find spots where prevailing winds gather leaves in quantity. If conditions are right, you could even find a ready-made natural supply of leafmould. You might exploit that for a year or two, but it's best to 'harvest' the leaves themselves whenever you get the chance. Winds change and
gales roar in, so the key is to be quick off the mark when a gatherable pile turns up.

You will scarcely – if ever – find leafmould for sale. That's probably because it's far too precious!

Donald Kennedy

GROWING WEEDS

There is a joy to growing weeds, and to selling them. They can be surprisingly challenging to grow: many have seeds that demand a good month of Perthshire ice-age before they break dormancy, and a fair few refuse to have anything to do with horticultural composts (attempts to establish that inimitable thug, sea buckthorn, on imitation potted sand dunes, have so far failed). But when they do get to selling point, don't dress them up as something else, but flog them with pride as the marauders and vagabonds they are. When folk look at variegated herb gerard and say, 'That looks awfully like bishopweed', they are quite right – because it is. It's astonishing how many people then go on to agree that the 'foliage is attractive, and yes, the flowers are a picture and – what, you say you can eat it? We-e-ll… I think I have just the spot for it…' Reminding them that it is superb ground cover usually clinches the deal!

With this sort of customer, often the very invasiveness of the

plant is its selling feature. They want robust natives and plants for a purpose, not for pampering; they appreciate the almighty splash effect of bistort on the march across a border, or the way sweet woodruff encroaches on its neighbours and sparkles in flower like stars in a green sky. They will be amused, not harassed, by sweet cicely seeding itself in the lawn, and St John's wort coming up in the paving.

Sometimes people go away with an armful of weeds because they already value the wildlife they will bring. Teasels, elecampane, hemp agrimony, purple loosestrife and valerian will help them attract more to their gardens, even though the plants themselves won't behave and stay where they are put. Others will use their weeds to enliven their diets, developing tastes for plantain, scurvy grass, solomon's seal or alexanders. It is just so satisfying seeing people valuing our wild plants – our wonderful weeds – rather than the usual over-bred, nectar-free, glasshouse-grown, temperamental assortments of begonias and petunias they might otherwise succumb to!

Margaret Lear

FOREST GARDENING

Your average field is a pretty boring place. No one drives out to the country of a Sunday morning and looks at a field. And with good reason. You might spend a few minutes appreciating the way the barley moves, sea-like, in the wind, but after that there isn't much to hold the attention: one species, one age, one height, sometimes most of the way to the horizon.

A forest is a different matter, and so is a forest garden, which is a food-growing system at least as productive as any field. A forest garden takes its lead from a wild forest, with edible or otherwise useful species, mostly perennial, forming the canopy, shrub, ground and fungal layers. So a forest garden, like a walk in the woods, is a multi-species, multi-coloured experience that surrounds you at all heights, buzzing with insects and loud with birds.

And you can eat it, too

Forest gardening is not the same as foraging or wild harvesting. It needs to be emphasised that a forest garden is first and foremost a garden, a human creation for human needs and, as such, requiring human effort to harvest and steer it. Also, many of the plants used in a typical forest garden are far from native. Mine has Japanese plum and Siberian pea tree in the canopy layer, North American shallon and chokeberries (nicer than they sound!) in the shrubs and Alpine campanulas and Mediterranean Asphodeline in the ground layer. Inside a pile of logs in a shady corner, shiitake mushrooms dream of Chinese oakwoods.

That said, there is a lot of overlap. There are lot of plants that I could technically forage but for reasons of time or scarcity I rarely do. It is very convenient to have a patch of them tucked into the forest garden. These include sorrel, wild garlic, hedge garlic, Good King Henry, pink purslane, pignut, wood violet, wild strawberries, wood sorrel, dittander, Scots lovage, sweet cicely, marjoram, soapwort, orpine, small-leaved lime, rock samphire, common mallow, native hogweed, salad burnet, sea kale and even ground elder. In addition a number of our favourite fruit bushes, like blackcurrants and raspberries, are derived from native species. Finally, a lot of edible species have close relatives amongst the natives, like the edible hawthorns and whitebeams.

To an experienced forager, this may all sound rather unsporting, cheating perhaps. Isn't the fun of foraging all to do with the experience of going out in the wild and finding things? Where is the forest gardener's incentive to get out into actual forests. For me, there are a number of things that I still bring back from the wild.

Firstly, temperate forest gardening is in its infancy, at the stage that agriculture with annual plants was when cabbages were bitter-leaved plants growing on sea cliffs. There is a huge potential for finding useful variations that would make perennial food plants more productive, easier to harvest, tastier and so on. One of them may be growing in the wild near you. There are obvious legal restrictions on what you can bring home, but between sowing seeds, grafting and asking the landowner's permission, there should usually be a way.

Secondly, you can go foraging for knowledge. Forest gardening depends on finding the right place for the right plant and where this might be depends on soil and climate. Most forest garden research in the UK has been done in the south-west of England, where a milder climate gives a completely different forest structure to Scotland. Seeing the conditions that a plant chooses for itself in the wild helps you to put it in the right place, with the right associations, in the forest garden, creatively blurring the boundary between wild harvesting and cultivation.

Alan Carter

Seasonal Harvesting Chart

The following chart provides an at-a-glance guide to the best times of year to harvest each species, and what part of the plant you should be aiming for. The species have been arranged according to their respective families. A separate harvesting chart for seaweeds follows.

Family	Species	Plant part to harvest
	SPRING	
Birch *Betulaceae*	Birch	Young leaves and sap
Cabbage *Brassicaceae*	Dittander	Leaves
	Garlic mustard	Young leaves
Carrot *Umbellifera*	Bishop's weed	Young leaves
Take great care in identifying, as this group contains some very poisonous plants	Hogweed	Young shoots and leaf stalks
	※ *Wear gloves to harvest and be careful not to confuse with giant hogweed*	
	Sweet cicely	Young leaves
	※ *Sweet, aniseed scent helps identification*	
Conifer families	Juniper	Fruit
	Spruce	Shoots
Daisy *Asteraceae*	Burdock	Stems and shoots
	Dandelion	Young leaves and roots
Dock *Polygonaceae*	Bistort	Young leaves
	Sorrel	Leaves
	※ *Don't eat at same meal as rhubarb or spinach*	
Elder *Caprifoliaceae*	Elder	Flowers
Elm *Ulmaceae*	Wych elm	Seeds
Lime *Tiliaceae*	Lime	Young leaves

Nettle *Urticaceae*	Nettle ❊ *Wear gloves to harvest*	Shoots
Onion *Lillaceae*	Few-flowered leek	Leaves
	Wild garlic/Ramsons ❊ *Don't confuse with lily of the valley, which is poisonous*	Leaves
Pea *Fabaceae*	Bitter vetch	Tubers
	Common vetch family ❊ *Avoid the seed pods unless you are confident with this family*	Shoots
	Gorse	Flowers
Pink *Caryophyllaceae*	Chickweed	Young growth
Rose *Rosaceae*	Hawthorn	Young leaves

Family	Species	Plant part to harvest
	SUMMER	
Barberry *Berberidaceae*	Barberry	Berries
Carrot *Umbellifera*	Hogweed	Young shoots and leaf stalks
	Pignut	Tubers
	Sweet cicely	Young leaves
Daisy *Asteraceae*	Dandelion	Young leaves and roots
	Yarrow	Flowers and leaves
Dock *Polygonaceae*	Sorrel	Young leaves
Heather *Ericaceae*	Blaeberry	Berries
	Cowberry	Berries
	Cranberry	Berries
	Heather	Flowers

Honeysuckle *Caprifoliaceae*	Elder	Flowers
Lime *Tiliaceae*	Lime	Blossom
Mint *Lamiaceae*	Water mint	Leaves
	Wild marjoram	Leaves
	Wild thyme	Leaves
Mushrooms	Chanterelle	Whole fungus
	Field mushroom	Whole fungus
	Giant puffball	Whole fungus
Nettle *Urticaceae*	Nettle	Shoots
Pea *Fabaceae*	Bitter vetch	Tubers
	Gorse	Flowers
Pink *Caryophyllaceae*	Chickweed	Young growth
Rose *Rosaceae*	Bird cherry	Fruit
	Bramble	Berries
	Cherry	Fruit
	Cherry plum	Fruit
	Damson	Fruit
	Meadowsweet	Blossom
	Salad burnet	Young leaves
	Silverweed	Young leaves and roots
	Wild raspberry	Berries
	Wild rose	Petals
	Wild strawberry	Berries
Spinach *Chenopodiaceae*	Fat hen	Flower shoots
	Good King Henry	Flower shoots
	Marsh samphire	Stems

Family	Species	Plant part to harvest
	AUTUMN	
Beech *Fagaceae*	Beech	Nuts
	Sweet chestnut	Nuts
Birch *Betulaceae*	Hazel	Nuts
Carrot *Umbellifera*	Hogweed	Young shoots and leaf stalks
	✻ *Wear gloves to harvest and don't confuse with giant hogweed*	
Honeysuckle *Caprifoliaceae*	Elder	Berries
Mushrooms	Cep	Whole fungus
	Chanterelle	Whole fungus
	Horn of plenty	Whole fungus
	Wood hedgehog	Whole fungus
Rose *Rosaceae*	Crab apple	Fruit
	Hawthorn	Berries
	Rose	Hips
	Rowan	Berries
	Silverweed	Roots
	Sloe	Fruit

Family	Species	Plant part to harvest
	WINTER	
Conifer families	Juniper	Fruit
Pea *Fabaceae*	Gorse	Flowers
Sea buckthorn *Elaeagnaceae*	Sea buckthorn	Berries

Seaweed Harvesting Chart

Family	Species	When to collect
Brown	Dabberlocks *Alaria esculenta*	March–June
	Kombu *Laminaria digitata*	All year round
	Sea spaghetti *Himanthalia elongate*	April–October
	Sugar wrack *Saccharina latissima*	April–August
Red	Carageen *Chrondrus crispus*	March–October
Collect away from industrial areas and don't eat on a daily basis because they accumulate heavy metals	Dulse *Palminaria palmate*	May–October
	Nori *Porphyra umbilicalis*	October–April
	Pepper dulse *Osmundea pinnatifida*	March–June
Green	Gutweed *Enteromorpha intestinalis*	All year round, best in summer
	Sea lettuce *Ulva lactuca*	June–September

Contributor Biographies

Abbreviations used:

RS	Reforesting Scotland
SWHA	Scottish Wild Harvests Association
FC	Forestry Commission
RBGE	Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburg

Brenda Anderson (SWHA) is Head of Food Studies at the City of Glasgow College, a long time forager, and is involved in showcasing artisan producers.

Les Bates is a former Director of RS and a member of SWHA. With his wife, Sheila (who is Treasurer of SWHA), he founded Croft7, www.croft7.com, as a teaching resource for
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Lise Bech is an experienced basketmaker, artist and teacher. She grows her own willow and forages for foodstuffs and basketry materials. She is a long-term member of RS and SWHA. www.bechbaskets.net

Alan Carter is a long-term member, and current director of RS, and member of SWHA. He is a forester, a forager and a pioneer of forest gardening in Scotland. He blogs engagingly about the latter at: http://scottishforestgarden.wordpress. com; dalancarter@yahoo.co.uk

Emma Chapman is the founding force behind, and current

secretary, of SWHA, and a long-term member of RS. She is a beginner beekeeper and an urban forager who has been eating weeds all her life and sometimes gets further into the wild to gather good things.

Fred Conacher works as the Tree Officer for Angus Council's Parks Services, where he does very constructive things involving hazel, willow and orchards. He is a member of RS, Community Woodland Association (associate) and SWHA.

Jem Cox is a Master Thatcher and all-round craftsman. Like Jools (below), he belongs to both RS and SWHA.

Jools Cox is a founder member and current Chair of SWHA and long-time member of RS, as well as being actively engaged with South West Community Woodland Association where she is the force behind an Orchards and Wild Harvests project.

Alison Dyke (RS) is a lifelong forager. Her PhD on the politics, practice and ecology of 'non-timber forest products' helped her facilitate the development of sustainable wild harvesting guidance. A contributor to *Wild Harvests from Scottish Woodlands* (FC 2006), she now works at York University promoting public understanding of the natural world.

Ian Edwards is as an ecologist who works for RBGE. He is a former Director of RS, is the main editor of their book *Woodlanders*, and has been a lifelong forager.

Ron Gillies (SWHA) is the owner and founder of Cairn O' Mohr winery in Angus, where he uses a range of wild products as raw materials. Uniquely in Scotland, he has a

dedicated elder orchard.

Kenny Grieve (RS) runs Brotus Crafts in Fife, bringing education and activities connected with wood and all forms of woodland crafts to a wide audience of children and adults.

Mandy Haggith (RS) lives on a wooded croft in Assynt where she gardens, gathers and writes. She is a poet and author of the award-winning novel, *The Last Bear*. She blogs as 'cybercrofter'.

Erica Hollis is Membership Secretary of SWHA. She is a qualified medical herbalist, forages for plants for remedies but also cultivates many of our scarcer wild plants in her garden for both medicine making and education. She leads herbal walks and has an annual Garden Open Day.

Fiona Houston (SWHA) is a writer and journalist. With Xa Milne she published *Seaweed and Eat It*, a book about foraging with children. The two of them have founded the Celtic Sea Spice Company, www.seaspice.co.uk

Gregory Kenicer (SWHA) is a lecturer at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, with interests in biodiversity, evolution and ethnobotany. He finds all kinds of plant use fascinating. Donald Kennedy has been a member of RS from the start: his article on 'Organic Trees', the nursery he runs with his wife, Maggie, missed the deadline for the first-ever *RS Journal* but made the second. A tree surgeon, waller and ponticum killer, he now just about scrapes deadlines.

Lesley KilBride is a member of both RS and SWHA. She is an expert natural dyer, who runs courses on her Applecross

croft, inviting people to learn more of native plants and their uses as food and craft materials. www.croftwools.co.uk

Margaret Lear is a founder member of SWHA. She runs Plants with Purpose Nursery, specialising in growing useful and
edible plants (mostly weeds), and delivering workshops on foraging, food growing and orchard management. www.plantsandapples.co.uk

Nick Marshall (SWHA) is a long-term member and former Project Officer of RS who is now an environmental consultant with particular expertise in hardwoods and woodfuel. He set up and runs www.willowscotland.co.uk and http://treenurseryscotland.org.uk to help people locate native trees and craft willow grown in Scotland.

Fi Martynoga (RS and SWHA) writes regularly for the *RS Journal* and edited their *Handbook of Scotland's Trees*. She is a lifelong forager and gardener. She also writes as Fiona J Houston and is frequently confused with her namesake.

Clare Melinsky combines a professional life as an artist and illustrator with a private passion for gardening. She enjoys living in the Dumfriesshire countryside and is herself something of a forager. www.claremelinsky.co.uk

William Milliken has worked as an ethnobotanist in many parts of the world, is joint author of *Flora Celtica* and a passionate advocate of responsible wild harvesting, especially in Scotland. He formerly worked at RBGE and is now employed at Kew Gardens.

Xa Milne (SWHA) is passionate about seaweed. With Fiona Houston she wrote *Seaweed and Eat It*, about foraging with children. The two of them have founded the Celtic Sea Spice Company, www.seaspice.co.uk

Bryce Reynard (SWHA), who lives in Inverness, comes from a background of forty-two years as a professional forester and a lifelong interest in scouting and bushcraft. His life was changed in 1999 by attending a birch bark workshop, run by two Danes, since when he has explored the craft potential of all parts of Scotland's birch trees.

Willow Walker's passion is sea buckthorn. She markets a pulp of its berries, and may expand her business to include some products from hedgerow and wetland species. She also works
as a freelance botanist and shiatsu practitioner and is an active member of SWHA. www.wildandscottish.co.uk

Monica Wilde, a member of SWHA, co-runs Napiers the Herbalists. She runs courses, walks and talks on edible and medicinal foraging and is researching wild nutrition. She lives in a hand-built wooden house on four acres of 'managed wilderness'. monica@monicawilde.com

Brian Wilson (RS) is a thatcher and stoneworker, who is enthusiastic about building with local and natural materials, including straw-bale. He lives near Ullapool, Wester Ross. brian@ wildlandservices.fsnet.co.uk

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valerian 1
varicose veins 1, 2
Verbena officinalis 1

wassail 1
water mint 1
weeds 1
weeds-in-the-hole 1
Western Isles 1, 2:
Colonsay 1
whin (or gorse) 1
wild angelica 1
wild cherry (gean) 1
wild garlic (or ramsons) 1, 2
wild marjoram 1, 2
wild raspberry 1
wild raspberry leaf 1
wild thyme 1
willow 1, 2, 3
wine 1:
    birch sap 1;
    bramble 1;
    dandelion 1;
    elderflower 1;
    gorse 1;
    hawthorn blossom 1;
    spiced elderberry 1
wood avens 1
wood cauliflower 1
wood hedgehog 1
woodlands 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
woodworking 1
wych elm 1

xylophones 1

yarrow 1, 2, 3
yellow/curled dock 1

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and become one of this vital community of foresters and foragers, architects and artists, land owners and land reformers, woodwrights, writers, ecologists, chefs, diggers, dreamers, and people who love the woods and the wild.

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Fi Martynoga and Emma Chapman

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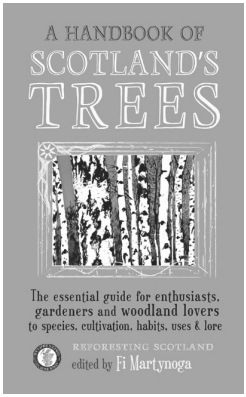
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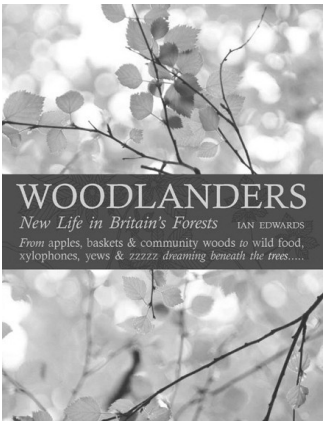
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